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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
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HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 252**

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 1994-95

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment

1. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the official numbers of (a) men and (b) women who were unemployed in the Greater London area as of 1 January 1995.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): The latest available figures show that, in November 1994, seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment in London stood at 307,800 for men and 106,800 for women. In each case, this represents a reduction of about 10 per cent. on a year ago.

Mr. Cox: Whatever the Minister may say, is he aware that Greater London has one of the highest unemployment rates of any region in the United Kingdom and that vast numbers of people are seeking the few jobs that exist? Exactly what are Government policies for Greater London to create meaningful employment, in view of the countless thousands of jobs that have been lost year by year since 1979?

Mr. Oppenheim: What the hon. Gentleman does not say is that many jobs in London were also lost in the 1970s. I think we all accept that unemployment in London is too high, as it is elsewhere in most parts of the developed western world. The only way to cure that is to improve the competitiveness and productivity of our economy, as we are doing, to produce more high-quality, better-paid jobs for our people.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend think that unemployment in Greater London would increase or be reduced if we adopted the social chapter, a national minimum wage or even clause IV, which seems to have some residual popularity in the Labour party?

Mr. Oppenheim: Almost every survey from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund shows that a minimum wage has an adverse effect on job creation. If the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) is serious about that policy, I challenge her to tell the House at what level she would set a minimum wage and what she would do about the problem of differentials.

Mr. Chidgey: Will the Minister confirm that surveys have shown that more than 80 per cent. of participants in workstart pilot schemes in London and elsewhere are likely to be offered permanent jobs? Does he agree that that is clear and concrete evidence of the need urgently to establish a working benefits transfer programme across the nation to get the long-term unemployed back into work?

Mr. Oppenheim: One of the good features of what is happening in London is that the number of very long-term unemployed people has fallen by about one half since 1987. There are a number of reasons for that, but one of the main ones is the effect of the very well-targeted Government schemes to help the very long-term unemployed, who have particular problems, to get back into work.

Youth Training

2. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of young people possess qualifications at the conclusion of youth training.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. James Paice): Seventy-two per cent. of young people completing youth training gain a qualification or credit towards one.

Mr. Waller: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging information. There is great variety in the level of qualifications that young people may obtain. Is my hon. Friend able to give more detailed data about the quality and level of qualifications that young people participating in youth training schemes can obtain?

Mr. Paice: I can assure my hon. Friend that there is substantial evidence that the level of qualifications being achieved through youth training is increasing year by year. A greater proportion are achieving national vocational qualifications, NVQs, at levels 2, 3 and 4. In addition, I assure my hon. Friend that when modern apprenticeships are fully up and running, they will lead to another substantial jump in the levels achieved.

Mr. Gerrard: I am sure that we would all welcome an increase in the number of people obtaining qualifications. However, in his answer the Minister did not quote the figures. One of the stated aims of youth training is to enable young people to obtain NVQs at level 2 or above. How many are attaining level 2 and how many are getting above that level?

Mr. Paice: I do not have the precise figure, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman something much more significant: more than 50 per cent. of all those leaving youth training, at any time after starting it, obtain jobs. That is the major importance of youth training. Of those who complete the training, 67 per cent. obtain jobs. That is a clear indication that youth training works for the vast majority of young people, as shown by surveys of them.

Jobseeker's Allowance

3. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he expects the jobseeker's allowance will improve the support that the Government provide for unemployed people.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): The jobseeker's agreement will reflect the responsibilities of the Employment Service and of the person seeking work so as to focus efforts and incentives on getting back to work.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that the question of limiting contributory benefits to six months is extremely important, and that the public want to know how both parties stand on it? Will he also confirm that, when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was asked about it three times on this morning's "Today" programme, she declined to say what her policy was?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I thought it an extraordinary performance. The Opposition have based their criticism of the Jobseekers Bill on the substitution of a six-month contributory period for a 12-month period, but if that is indeed the basis of their attack, surely they should be in a position to say that they would reverse the position if their party were in power. Three times the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) refused the opportunity to say that that was the case; three times I thought I heard a cock crow. It was just like yesterday, when the Leader of the Opposition was bleating about the privatisation of railways. He would not say that he would renationalise them.

Mr. Frank Field: Can the Secretary of State tell us how many people who pay for their national insurance benefits will be pushed on to means-tested benefits as a result of the Bill?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman knows that we must use our resources as best we can to focus benefit on those who need it most. He is one of the people who have made that point most consistently over the years. We need to focus the money that we have on helping those who are in most need, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support us this afternoon.

Mr. Matthew Banks: In view of the answer that he has just given, will my right hon. Friend make it absolutely clear that as he seeks to simplify an individually tailored job search, he and his Department will not lose sight of the vital principle of continuing to provide the most where the need is greatest?

Mr. Portillo: That should be an important principle and, indeed, I believe that hon. Members in all parties now agree on it. In future, we need to be able to provide a welfare state that we can afford and be proud of. That means that we must take care that the amount by which welfare state spending rises does not outstrip the economy's ability to pay. We shall have to make important choices, and direct benefits towards those who need them most. That is why it is so disappointing that the Commission on Social Justice, having agreed with the general proposition, has come up with proposals to raise public spending by £7 billion. That is no way forward for the welfare state, or for the Labour party.

Training

4. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department is spending on training for work in 1994-95; and what the level of planned spending is in 1995-96 in today's prices.

Mr. Portillo: The figures are £693 million this year, and £560 million next year in 1994-95 prices.

Mr. Hughes: How does the Secretary of State justify cutting the training for work budget, when he knows very well that there is a skill shortage and business people are crying out for skilled workers? What does he say to the people in my area—more than 1,000—who will lose out because of his cuts?

Mr. Portillo: I do not believe that people in the hon. Gentleman's area will lose out. I am making better use of public money, and the number of people who will obtain jobs from training for work will increase. It is estimated that 100,000 will obtain jobs this year, 104,000 next year and 116,000 the year after. I am providing a new range of opportunities for the long-term

unemployed. Training is not the only thing: jobs matter more to the long-term unemployed than training for the sake of training. Moreover, the hon. Gentleman should not forget that the amount of Government spending on training will always be dwarfed—and rightly so—by the £20 billion that industry spends on it.

Mr. Barron: Does the Secretary of State recognise that, because of cuts in the training budget, training and enterprise councils and training providers do not know where they stand and that, consequently, employers cannot plan for the future? Is it not clear that our successful companies and successful competitive countries have built their economic efficiency by having minimum standards in training? Why do not the Government accept that the market alone cannot build economic efficiency and that they must take action to ensure that minimum standards are in place throughout the British economy? Why do we have a new study today saying that we are in a position of having to train people for the sake of it? Why do not the Government train people for jobs and train the economy to utilise those people?

Mr. Portillo: It is rather silly to say that people do not know where they stand, when I have just given the figures and when I gave the figures at the time of the Budget. People know exactly where they stand. Before the Budget, they already knew that we had announced a £325 million programme to improve the competitiveness of this country under the competitiveness White Paper. At that time, one of the things that we introduced was the modern apprenticeship scheme, precisely to ensure that people could acquire the skills, under the training of an employer, that employers needed.

The whole focus of the Government's policy is to ensure that employees' skills are the skills that business needs. The only people who can tell us what business needs are business people. That is why the main emphasis on training in the British economy will always be provided by industry and not by the Government. What the Government spend, however, must be spent well, and we will have more jobs for less money. The hon. Gentleman should be happy about that.

Part-time Workers

5. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to grant rights to part-time workers in line with those enjoyed by full-time workers; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): My right hon. Friend announced on 20 December 1994 that, having carefully considered the position following the House of Lords judgment, the Government have decided to remove all hours of work thresholds from employment protection legislation. Appropriate regulations will shortly be laid before Parliament under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972.

Ms Eagle: Will the Minister now admit that that welcome change is long overdue and that it is only the first victory in Opposition Members' fight to guarantee minimum standards for people at work? Will she take this opportunity to congratulate the Equal Opportunities Commission on bringing and winning this case and will she reassure the House that the Government have no intention of undermining or abolishing the commission for doing such a good job?

Miss Widdecombe: There will be no victory whatever for part-time workers if, as a result of the ruling and of our implementation of it, part-time job opportunities decrease. That will be a loss for part-time workers. I hope that the hon. Lady will be as loud in her welcome for the measure if it proves to have that effect, because the electorate will then be able to understand exactly what they are in for if there is ever a Labour Government—which is unlikely.

The Government have never had any plans to abolish the Equal Opportunities Commission. I gather that that is just another Labour party scare story and it goes to prove what I have long suspected: new Labour is simply a few superficial new statements and all the old immorality and scaring of the vulnerable.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware that many mothers with school-age children greatly welcome part-time work? It enables them to work, to contribute to their household budget and to look after their children, which many of us think is a good idea. It also helps our manufacturing industry to produce more goods to sell as exports and in the home market.

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed. It is precisely because Britain has a flexible labour market that it enjoys nearly one third of all part-time jobs in Europe. The vast majority of those jobs are of benefit to women. We know that 85 per cent. of people who work part time do not do so because they cannot find a full-time job. It is, therefore, our policies that have liberated women to enable them to combine work and family life and the Labour party's policies that would make it impossible for women to make that choice. Perhaps women will note that.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister should be at the Dispatch Box apologising for another defeat in the United Kingdom courts. It is only the British Government who oppose decent minimum standards in the workplace. Employers and employees accept the need for those standards and it is only the Minister and her right hon. and hon. Friends who do not.

Since the Government have accepted the House of Lords decision, will the Government be organising a national campaign among employers to distribute material and information packages to part-time workers to advise them of their rights in the workplace so that they can take advantage of the House of Lords ruling? What does the Minister say to the 3.7 million part-time women workers in this country who earn less than the Council of Europe decency threshold? Does she not believe that they are entitled to decent pay for a decent day's work?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I should apologise. The only apologies due are from the Labour party, for its total disregard for the creation of work opportunities, for its total disregard for the expansion of opportunities for women and for its total disregard for the effects of the flexibility of our labour market on the percentage of our work force. Will the Labour party congratulate us on the fact that

we have the third highest percentage of the work force in work? Will it congratulate us on having among the largest numbers of part-time opportunities and on the narrowing of the gap between the pay of women and men? Will the Labour party congratulate us on all that and apologise for its own stale, useless policies?

Mr. Couchman: Has my hon. Friend's Department yet had time to research the number of opportunities for part-time work that may be lost as a result of this decision from Europe? Has she had time to consult the leaders of those sections of commerce and industry that have particularly high numbers of part-time workers, such as in shops and in the hotel and catering trade, in which I recently had an interest?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important point. We are cognisant of the likely adverse effects of this judgment. That is why we have made it clear that we will monitor those effects carefully; if we believe that such adverse effects are clearly discernible and are upheld, we will consider again whether we have objective justification for our previous policy.

6. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research his Department has commissioned about the consequences for British part-time workers of EU equality legislation.

Miss Widdecombe: There is already a substantial body of international evidence that more regulated economies are less successful in creating job opportunities.

Ms Quin: I, too, welcome the Government's climbdown on part-time workers. In light of the information that the Minister has just provided, will she tell me why Denmark and Holland both have a higher proportion of part-time workers than we have, yet they have higher levels of employment protection and accept the social chapter?

Hon. Members: Answer that one.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I will.

Across Europe as a whole, there is a clear correlation between regulation and part-time job opportunities: the southern member states have high regulation and the least number of part-time jobs; Denmark and Britain, which have the most liberal regimes for part-time workers, have the highest. If the hon. Lady had done her homework, she would know that in Holland that is a result of the fact that the benefits system allows benefits to be claimed, particularly in respect of invalidity, when part-time work is undertaken. Regulation of the labour market right across Europe, as has been acknowledged by a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, has an adverse impact on jobs, not a favourable one.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I very much regret the action that the Government have been forced to take and recognise what my hon. Friend the Minister has said in that regulation is the enemy of jobs, both part time and full time. Is my hon. Friend aware that a company in the manufacturing sector in my constituency which employs 150 people told me only this week that, as a result of the imposition of EC regulations, its costs have increased by £33,000 a year, thus making it much more difficult to compete in export markets? Is my hon. Friend continuing to give evidence to the deregulation unit to ensure that that sort of nonsensical and unnecessary regulation does not happen?

Miss Widdecombe: I can also give clear confirmation that, wherever possible, we shall resist any unnecessary imposition of social legislation coming from Europe. Indeed, it is precisely because we are doing so that unemployment is falling faster in Britain than in other EC countries. It is precisely because we are resisting that we have such a buoyant economy and, in light of the period that we have been through, British businesses and workers should now think very carefully before consigning their future to the all-embracing social chapter policies proposed by the Opposition.

Modern Apprenticeship Scheme

7. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people per year are expected to gain an NVQ3 qualification through the new modern apprenticeship scheme.

Mr. Paice: If employers respond as we expect, around 70,000 young people each year in England will gain a national vocational qualification level 3 or higher through modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships.

Mr. Shepherd: Does my hon. Friend agree that modern apprenticeship schemes are just what many bright young people and, indeed, employers need today? Will he commend the training and enterprise councils that have made progress in that direction with such success and will he redouble his efforts to bring together employers and TECs in areas where progress has not been made so that the success can be consolidated?

Mr. Paice: Yes, Madam Speaker. My hon. Friend speaks from a position of great advantage because HAWTEC, the TEC in his area, not only was one of the first to receive a three-year licence but is one of those closely involved in the development of a prototype modern apprenticeship in retail management. That is a great step forward and an example that should be followed by all TECs. We are doing everything we can to ensure that the prototypes will be increased by 42 extra sectors this autumn and that there will be plenty of opportunities for everyone who wishes to follow a modern apprenticeship in the future.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Minister realise that south London has experienced not only the bankruptcy of skill centres but the insolvency of its training and enterprise council and cuts? What effect will that have on young people's training and what example are the Government setting to those young people in how they run their affairs?

Mr. Paice: The decision to bring in the receivers to the South Thames TEC was regrettable, but necessary to protect taxpayers and trainees. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that we have already given a commitment that we shall do everything that we can to ensure that training programmes are not interrupted and that training providers are guaranteed funding for the

next three months for programmes that they have already contracted. We are discussing with local authorities and others how the provision of training in that area will continue after 1 April. The hon. Gentleman should not expect any diminution in the training effort in the South Thames area, in any other part of London or in the country as a whole.

Statutory Minimum Wage

8. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what independent research he has commissioned into the impact within the EC on employment from a statutory minimum wage.

Mr. Oppenheim: There is substantial evidence from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and other sources that minimum wages have destroyed jobs in Europe.

Mr. Madden: As the Secretary of State likes to pose as a Tory thinker who never misses an opportunity to attack the statutory minimum wage and its impact on employment, is it not extraordinary that he is so reluctant to commission an independent study so that we can test that argument objectively? Could it be that he is anxious to ensure that facts do not spoil his pseudo-intellectual political rant?

Mr. Oppenheim: I could point the hon. Gentleman to any number of independent studies, ranging from that of the International Monetary Fund to the European Commission's White Paper on competitiveness, which point to the minimum wage as a destroyer of jobs in Europe. However, we do not have to look to independent surveys; we have only to look at the facts. Youth unemployment in France is twice that of the United Kingdom and in Spain youth unemployment is three times our level. Is that what the hon. Gentleman wants for Britain?

Mr. Ottaway: It is not so much the existence of the minimum wage that destroys jobs, but the level at which it is set. Is not the problem with the Opposition's proposals that they always bounce round a figure that is far too high?

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend is right. I find it absolutely astonishing that the Opposition spokeswoman can come to the House proposing a policy of a minimum wage without telling the House the level at which it would be introduced and what the Opposition would do about differentials. Until she is able to do that, the minimum wage policy will be nothing more than a cynical ploy designed to trick the less well-off into believing that there is some easy, pat way to raise living standards with no cost to the economy. There is not.

Ms Harman: Why has the Secretary of State for Employment ducked out of answering the question asked today by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) about the minimum wage? Is it because he was overruled by the Cabinet when it decided to keep the agricultural wages board? Does not that reluctant decision by the Government vindicate what Labour has said all along about the minimum wage—that it protects good employers from being undercut by the bad, that it ensures fairness at work and that it does not cost jobs?

Mr. Oppenheim: The only person who is ducking questions is the hon. Lady. She had a perfect opportunity just now to tell the House the level at which she would introduce the minimum wage and what she would do about the differentials. The House should not take my word for the problems that the minimum wage would cause. It should take the words of Lord Healey, who said recently:

"don't kid yourselves. The minimum wage is something on which unions will build differentials . . . therefore, the minimum wage becomes a floor on which to build a new tower."

Lord Healey said that two months ago. He can see sense; why cannot the hon. Lady?

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will my hon. Friend try some independent research by agreeing with the unions to halve the rate of pay for 16-year-olds in a Government Department—perhaps his own—to see whether, as the pay is halved from £90, the number of 16-year-olds employed doubles, or increases even further?

Mr. Oppenheim: I am not sure that that is necessarily a course that we would like to follow. I say to my hon. Friend and to Opposition Members that, of course, all of us, on both sides of the House, would like people, especially at the low end, to be better paid. The question is how to achieve that. We say that we should invest in education, invest in skills and make people more productive so that we can afford to pay them more in a sustainable way. The Opposition say that we should pay them more regardless of productivity. That would result in low pay being replaced by no pay.

Long-term Unemployment

9. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline his proposals to assist long-term unemployed people.

Mr. Portillo: We are pursuing a number of programmes that make it more worth while for people who have been unemployed for a long time to take a job without fear of being worse off and we are providing employers with financial incentives to give such people jobs.

Mr. Kennedy: Is the Secretary of State aware that in an area such as Easter Ross in the Scottish highlands, an area of concern to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), where there is not much market access to a diversity of jobs because of the concentration of dependence on oil and oil-related industries, long-term unemployment is now very deep rooted? Many people there are finding it impossible to be competitive in the labour market or to enjoy access to the labour market. How can the Secretary of State believe that in that increasingly hopeless situation for many people, the jobseeker's allowance will be of any benefit?

Mr. Portillo: The position is not, as the hon. Gentleman puts it, increasingly hopeless. Even in his own constituency, unemployment has come down by 10 per cent. since December 1992. That underlines the point that jobs will be created in a sustained period of recovery;

that involves the Government pursuing policies of low inflation, controlling their spending and controlling their borrowing.

I have been concentrating on helping people over what I call the job hump—helping them to see that when they go into a job after a long period of being unemployed, they will be better off. That is why, for example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget that people's housing benefit payments will be sustained for four weeks when they take a job and that is why we made it more attractive to employers to take on people who are long-term unemployed by giving them a one-year holiday on their national insurance contributions if they take on people who have been out of a job for two years or more.

Mr. Forman: Has my right hon. Friend assessed the difference between the proportion of long-term unemployed at the end of the recent recession, from which we have now emerged, and the proportion of long-term unemployed at the end of the recession in the early 1980s? Can any lessons be drawn from those two experiences?

Mr. Portillo: Figures obviously change from time to time and I am slightly cautious about drawing too much of a lesson from the figures to which my hon. Friend refers. I draw a lesson from the fact that long-term unemployment in this country is about 35 per cent. of the total and that the average for Europe is about 42 per cent. of the total. I therefore believe that, as in the other things that we have been discussing today, greater labour-market flexibility and active measures taken by the Employment Service directed at the long-term unemployed not only help to bring down unemployment generally, but ensure that long-term unemployment is a lesser proportion of the total unemployment in this country than elsewhere.

Full-time Workers

10. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the change in the number of full-time workers in employment from February 1993 to the present.

Mr. Oppenheim: The number of full-time workers in Great Britain rose by 29,000 between the winter 1992 and summer 1994 labour force surveys.

Mr. Hain: Can the Minister confirm that according to the labour force survey and other statistics provided by his Department, the fall in full-time unemployment—admirable of course—between March 1993 and September 1994 of 200,000 was matched by a rise in full-time employment of just 30,000? In other words, 170,000 full-time workers have disappeared from the dole queues into the twilight world of, at best, full-time work, or casual or part-time work; or just as likely on to income support and sickness benefit? Why does not he admit that the Government's employment policy is a total fraud?

Mr. Oppenheim: I have to say that I am with the Trades Union Congress on this. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are two different measures of unemployment and employment. One is the claimant count, the other is the International Labour Organisation international standard labour force survey, which the TUC said recently was "wholly reliable". If there were some great fiddling of the figures, one would think that the labour force survey total would differ significantly from the claimant count total. But the figures are almost exactly the same, which blows a huge hole in the Opposition's argument that the claimant figures are a fiddle.

Equal Opportunities Commission

12. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Miss Widdecombe: As I said earlier when the question was somewhat pre-empted, the Government have no plans to seek changes to the legislation which defines the Equal Opportunities Commission's responsibilities and duties.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister congratulate the Equal Opportunities Commission on its support of part-time workers and of minimum standards? Will he comment on the leaked memo which implies that the Equal Opportunities Commission is a rent-a-quote organisation and that it could be merged with other equality agencies? Does not she realise that if that downgrading were to happen, the Minister and the Government would be seen as being malicious and spiteful towards an independent organisation which supports Labour's minimum wage and Labour's fight for decent standards for all workers?

Miss Widdecombe: Having made it very clear that those changes are not going to take place, I do not think that it is a question of whether the Government are malicious and spiteful, but that there is rather a lot of malice and spite in deliberately trying to muddy waters which have been made quite clear—there are no such changes. If the hon. Lady relied on statements, questions and good homework, instead of merely on leaked, stolen documents, she might do rather better.

Mr. John Townend: Will my hon. Friend consider that if we really are the Government of deregulation, it is about time that we abolished the Equal Opportunities Commission? It has done any work which was necessary; it is now a waste of taxpayers' money.

Miss Widdecombe: I can only refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier. We have no plans to change the terms on which the EOC carries out its statutory responsibilities. Despite some of the actions of the EOC and some of its rulings, it is still a fact that the United Kingdom is the only European Union country which has a lower unemployment rate for women than for men.

That is a solid achievement and is worth all the rhetoric in the world about minimum wages and good standards. The real standard that matters is opportunity. We are the Government of opportunity for women; the Labour party is not. All that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) could talk about on the subject of the Equal Opportunities Commission was simply a load of speculation. That means that the Labour party does not have any policies for women either.

Unemployment

13. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of those currently unemployed have been out of work longer than one year.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest available figures show that in October 1994 there were 956,475 claimants who had been unemployed for over a year. That represents a fall of 11 per cent. compared with 12 months ago.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Does she agree that a good many of the long-term unemployed never intend to work again, ever? They are, in my words, layabouts—*[Interruption.]* Well, they work in the black economy and they draw benefit. People want to know when we are going to put a stop to that. I want to know when those long-term unemployed layabouts are going to have to do a job, day in, day out, in the community before they receive any taxpayers' money at all.

Miss Widdecombe: The long-term unemployed who are genuinely seeking work are being helped, and will continue to be helped, by a wide range of Government initiatives including those expansions of initiatives that were announced in the Budget. For those unemployed, whether long term or short term, who are not actively seeking work, there are proposals, which will shortly be before the House, for the jobseeker's allowance which I hope will go some way towards satisfying my hon. Friend's worries.

Mr. O'Hara: May I give the Minister a further opportunity to answer a straight question? How, on the measures that she has accepted, can she explain the difference between a drop of 200,000 in unemployed claimants and a rise of 30,000 in those employed?

Miss Widdecombe: If only Opposition Members would learn that unemployment does not work on stock for stock; there are flows as well. If only the hon. Gentleman would learn how unemployment works, he might be able to answer his own question. One never knows.

Training

14. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department is spending on training for work in 1994-95; and what the level of planned spending is in 1995-96 in today's prices.

Mr. Paice: The figures for England were given earlier to the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Connarty: Is the Minister willing to admit that the cut which was published in his own plans of 24.5 per cent. in training for work is only part of the overall cut, between now and the end of the published plans, of 12 per cent. or £245 million in education and training in the Department of Employment's budget? Is the Minister aware of the contradiction revealed in the latest skills survey—"Skill Needs in Britain—1994"—which shows that 11 per cent. of vacancies in Britain are difficult to fill and that that figure has risen from 5 per cent. in 1992 and 6 per cent. in 1993? The contradiction is that the Government are not serving the country's employers or the country's training needs.

Mr. Paice: This Government believe in value for money. Whatever the problem, the Opposition want to throw more money at it. The Government's policy on training is quite clear: we are looking for better, higher outputs for less money. We will be saving the taxpayer £450 million and we will be getting more people back to work. That is in the best interests of the unemployed and of the taxpayer. That is what the Government believe is right and that obviously contradicts what the Opposition think.

Unemployment

15. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by how much unemployment in the north-west changed during the period 1979 to 1984; and by how much it changed during the period 1974 to 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: Between 1974 and 1979, claimant unemployment in the north-west increased at a rate of 1,175 per month, nearly double the increase over the period under this Government from 1979 to 1994.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the north-west can look forward to a future of falling unemployment under this Government's policies and that we should not cease to challenge socialist policies which saw unemployment in the north-west more than double in the four years from 1974 to 1979?

Mr. Oppenheim: It is very good news that unemployment is now falling in the north-west. However, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Just as unemployment doubled under Labour in the 1970s, it would go up again if Labour was to impose its ludicrous minimum wage in respect of which the Opposition spokeswoman cannot even come to the House to tell us at what rate it would be introduced and what she would do about differentials.

The minimum wage is a con on the less well-off to try to trick them into thinking that there is an easy, pat, quick-fix solution to low pay. There is not. The minimum wage would replace low pay with no pay.

Mr. Flynn: Has the Minister noticed that Britain's second highest-paid civil servant, the head of the Central Statistical Office, said about the Government's employment and unemployment figures that nobody—nobody—in the country believes them? Why is that?

Mr. Oppenheim: If the hon. Gentleman had read Mr. McLennan's remarks in full, he would have read that the gentleman in question said that he had full confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the claimant count figures. The Trades Union Congress recently said exactly the same thing. I agree, though, that we would like more attention paid to the labour force survey. That is why we have increased its frequency from annually to quarterly. It is interesting that the labour force survey unemployment total is almost exactly the same as the claimant count total, which shows that there can be no fiddle in the claimant count total.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ms Corston: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is totally unacceptable for the Government or for any individual Minister to hide behind Britain's laudable ban of the veal crate system while turning a blind eye to the annual export of hundreds of thousands of calves, knowing full well that they will spend their short lives in wooden boxes in the dark?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has done more than most people in this country to try to change the laws right across Europe to deal with veal. Both he and I would like to see less trade in live animals and more in carcase form. But, as the hon. Lady will know, there is a long tradition of Agriculture Ministers having farming interests, which they rightly stand back from when they are Agriculture Ministers. What the hon. Lady did not mention was that my right hon. Friend's farm is managed on a day-to-day basis by a farm management company headed by a Labour Front-Bench spokesman in the House of Lords.

Q2. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evans: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members want to wish him and his family a very happy and prosperous new year? Is it the Conservative party that wants to put VAT on school fees, split up the United Kingdom with devolution plans, or nationalise utilities under clause IV, or is it the lot opposite, led by Bambi, with his 60 quid-a-week haircut, who sends his son to a grant-maintained school when his party want to abolish them? Is there anything more dishonourable than that? I do not think so. *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: I can tell, Madam Speaker, that this is going to be an uncontroversial Session of Parliament. My hon. Friend leads us in that direction. Clearly, the policy-making activities of the principal opposition party are running into some difficulties at the moment. I do not think that many people are quite sure who these days is forming Labour policy on education, health, energy and other subjects. The closer one examines Labour policy, the more it falls apart. My hon. Friend should not object to that; he should lie back and enjoy it.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree that any attempt by the rail regulator under privatisation to cut through-ticketing, with the result that people may have to travel 50 miles to get a train ticket, would be utterly unacceptable, and will he, if necessary, intervene to stop such an attempt?

The Prime Minister: As the Secretary of State for Transport said the other day, and as I am happy to reaffirm, we have repeatedly made clear our commitment to maintaining through-ticketing. Through-ticketing should continue to be available from a wide range of outlets, to meet passengers' needs. The regulator, like other regulators, is by law independent, but the Secretary of State has powers to give him guidance under the Railways Act 1993. The regulator is bound to take account of such guidance, but at this stage, prior to the issue of a consultation document, the question of guidance is entirely premature.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister has no power to prevent the regulator from introducing such an arrangement—what he has described is merely guidance—will he undertake that if the regulator makes such proposals he will direct the franchising director not to offer a franchise to any of the 25 companies unless it offers a complete through-ticket service?

The Prime Minister: As I have told the right hon. Gentleman, I am at least as committed to through-ticketing as he is. He is trying yet again to have it both ways. The Labour party complains routinely that the Government should have more powers over the regulator, but if we had such direct powers it would complain about Government interference, as it did during the rail strike.

Mr. Blair: I shall tell the Government what we complain of—the railway system being sold off instead of being used as a proper public service. If the Prime Minister cannot guarantee through-ticketing, and if he is prepared to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on a privatisation that people do not want, when the public rightly fear that it will be used to produce the same pay excesses as exist in other privatised utilities, why does he not accept, as this country does, that our party's campaign to halt the privatisation is right, and that the railways should be retained as a proper integrated public service?

The Prime Minister: If privatisation is as bad as the right hon. Gentleman says, why will he not commit himself to renationalisation of British Rail? After 50 years of nationalisation, is he really satisfied with the present rail service? Can he name any time at which the service was satisfactory? If not, why does he oppose changes that will make it satisfactory? The Labour party has opposed every privatisation. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman what Labour said about other privatisations. It said that British Airways would be

"the pantomime horse of capitalism if it is anything at all".

British Airways is the most efficient airline in the world. I have a stack of similar quotations for the right hon. Gentleman, about every privatisation. Privatisation works; we are privatising rail and there will be a better service.

Mr. Dover: What hope can the Prime Minister give to the oppressed people of Chechnya, in view of the determination of President Dudayev and of the Chechnen people?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that anyone doubts that a tragedy has been taking place in Chechnya in recent

weeks. Chechnya is indisputably part of the Russian Federation, and the long-standing revolt that has taken place there under local leadership has posed serious problems. I share my hon. Friend's implicit concern about the way in which the problem has been handled in recent weeks and about the bombardment that has led to so many civilian casualties. As with other allies, we have expressed our concerns directly to the Russian Government. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary saw the Russian ambassador this morning.

Q3. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: Under this Government, can any Cabinet Minister claim that he is responsible only for the policy of his Department and not for its operational failings, however many there are and however many have been preceded by warnings from those in a position to know that things are going wrong? Is not good government about running things properly? What will happen to Ministers who have proved not to have done that?

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State concerned is responsible for the policy of a Department, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made clear in the illustration to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred. Operational matters fall into a different category, as has been the case for many years. The right hon. Gentleman is clearly referring to recent gaol escapes, and he will know that during the past 20 or 30 years there have been a large number of incidents under Governments of both major parties, and also a Government involving the Liberal party. Such incidents have occurred without making necessary the resignation of the appropriate Secretary of State.

Q4. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Townsend: Recalling that neither my right hon. Friend nor myself voted for the Second Reading of the War Crimes Act 1991, and noting that the funding for the special war crimes unit at New Scotland Yard is to be wound up at the end of March, will my right hon. Friend consider drawing stumps on the whole grisly business? It must be perfectly obvious that not a single person will ever be successfully prosecuted under that expensive Act.

The Prime Minister: It was recognised from the outset that the police investigations into serious crimes which were committed a long time ago would be difficult. I understand that the police investigations will be completed by the end of March this year. The decision therefore on whether or not to prosecute will be made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, who will be advised by the Director of Public Prosecutions. I prefer to await that advice before saying more.

Mr. Janner: Does the Prime Minister agree that, in the matter of war crimes, we are talking about personal involvement in mass murder? As the House has repeatedly approved the principle in the War Crimes Act, will he confirm that if—but only if—there is sufficient evidence against individuals of complicity in that murder, they will be prosecuted no matter how long they have managed to evade justice?

The Prime Minister: I think that that was implicit in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) a moment ago, when I made clear that a decision on whether or not to prosecute will not be a political decision. The decision will be made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General upon the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Q5. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shepherd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a full range of educational opportunity is of the utmost importance to the citizens of this country? Is not it clear from the utterances of the past few days that the old, nasty Labour party is waiting to leap out, given half a chance?

The Prime Minister: I am not altogether sure that it has not already leapt out during the past few days. We have seen the quickest U-turn in history about a tax on school fees, the education spokesman unfortunately not being told what the education policies really are; and Opposition spokesmen in open disagreement about a graduate tax and a range of other totally and utterly vindictive education policies. Those policies will show everyone where the Labour party stands on equality of choice, opportunity and freedom.

Q6. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Prime Minister aware of the concern that has been expressed by many fire service authorities about reductions in their expenditure, which may bring about a danger to property and to life? May I warn him of the situation in West Yorkshire? There has been a £3.2 million cut in expenditure, which could mean a reduction of 116 firefighters in West Yorkshire. Will the Prime Minister take action to ensure that we have continuity of service which will help in the protection of property and life in West Yorkshire in particular, and across the country in general?

The Prime Minister: Of course the fire service is immensely important. Of course we will make a judgment that we believe will ensure that it can be adequately available to all people who are likely to need it. I am not immediately familiar with the particular circumstances of West Yorkshire. It would be surprising were I to be so. I shall certainly ask my right hon. Friend to look particularly at that in the light of what the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Kynoch: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the proposal for a Scottish Parliament put forward by the Labour party must inevitably lead to higher taxes and

costs for businesses, particularly in Scotland? Does he further agree that if that is so, it will inevitably be the first stage on the slippery slope towards the break-up of the United Kingdom—something which the Labour party seems to be intent on achieving?

The Prime Minister: I fully understand the many people in Scotland and, indeed, in Wales, who believe that a tax-raising assembly may be of assistance to them. I passionately believe, in their interests, that that is a mistaken judgment. I do not believe that the degree of investment that has gone into Scotland and Wales would continue if those investing there had the unique advantage of being more highly taxed than people in other parts of the United Kingdom. I see a great danger of businesses uprooting themselves and moving away from Scotland.

I have seen no answers yet to the West Lothian question, which the Leader of the Opposition apparently failed to understand when he was asked about it at a press conference yesterday. I have no doubt that the sort of devolution proposed by the Labour party would do immense damage, first to the people of Scotland, secondly to the people of Wales—although they would apparently have a lesser form of devolution—and above all to everyone throughout the United Kingdom.

Fisheries Council

3.30 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives) (*by private notice*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement on the outcome of the European Fisheries Council meeting in Brussels on 22 December.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): I represented the United Kingdom at the Fisheries Council on 19, 20 and, after a break, 22 December, assisted by my hon. Friend the Minister of State in my Department, my hon. and noble Friends the Under-Secretaries of State for Scotland and my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The main issue before the Council was a package of proposals designed to implement the integration of Spanish and Portuguese fishing into the common fisheries policy. The House will recall that discussions took place against the background that, under the terms of Spanish and Portuguese accession, which was supported by all parties in the House at the time, no special restrictions could apply to Spanish fishing in the so-called Irish box after 1995.

After lengthy discussions, the Council agreed that from 1 January 1996 Spanish vessels would continue to be totally excluded from the Irish sea and the Bristol channel. In addition, Spanish vessel numbers in that part of the box west of Scotland would be severely limited and, overall, the number of Spanish vessels fishing within the box could not exceed 40 at any one time. The Irish box thus continues as a special control area. The agreement does not have any effect on the existing exclusion of Spanish vessels from the North sea nor, indeed, on the principle of so-called relative stability for national quotas. Nothing in the deal that was agreed causes British fishermen to lose quota nor Spanish fishermen in total to gain any.

The Council rejected, at our insistence, the Commission's proposed over-bureaucratic effort control proposals, which had been widely criticised in the House. It was also agreed that member states would play the major role in defining how their fleets' effort should be controlled in the relevant sea areas, though with safeguards to prevent abuse. Given the position against which I had to negotiate, those agreements represented significant achievements. Nevertheless, since the Council felt unable to accept the exclusion of Spanish vessels from the celtic sea also, I decided to abstain on the final proposal, which was, therefore, adopted by qualified majority. Fisheries departments will be consulting the industry closely about the arrangements for implementing the agreement.

The Council also reached agreement on 1995 total allowable catches and quotas. The 1994 TACs for the North sea stocks jointly managed with Norway were rolled forward for three months to allow time for discussions with Norway. For the remaining stocks, the Commission proposed wide-ranging cuts in TACs. In a number of cases, it was possible for the Council to agree slightly higher TACs than the Commission had proposed. Those increases raised the value of our fleet's 1995 quotas by about £14 million at today's prices, compared with the Commission's original proposals.

I fully understand the anxieties being expressed in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere. He and his constituents will know the background against which the negotiations took place. I shall not try to pretend to the House that the final agreement was ideal, but we achieved most of our realistic negotiating objectives. At the beginning of the negotiations we were faced with a package which, although it might have been imposed on us, could not have been defended in the House. We achieved an outcome which, although less good than I would have wanted, is far better than many people inside or outside the industry predicted.

Mr. Harris: Does my right hon. Friend really appreciate the depth of justifiable anger felt on behalf of fishermen, especially in the south-west and in my constituency, about the way in which other member states and the Commission apparently ganged up against the United Kingdom in that final vote? Having fought so hard and so well on behalf of those fishermen, why on earth did he abstain rather than vote against this wretched package? Can he now hold out any hope of a compensatory package to those fishermen, especially one that would increase the amount of decommissioning money, because they surely deserve better than the deal that they got at the end of those Brussels talks?

Mr. Waldegrave: I and my hon. Friend the Minister of State genuinely understand the frustration and, in some cases, the anger of my hon. Friend's constituents. I think that my hon. Friend would confirm that, whatever is agreed, they are often driven by the fact that, although the agreements might be tolerable, they suspect and believe that Spanish fishermen do not keep to them, which is another matter.

I accept that this was a fine judgment. Faced with the fact that the other member states were giving us more things that we wanted right up to the end of the negotiations, especially on Scotland and Northern Ireland, which are also important in this matter, it was right to recognise the fact that we had come a very long way from the initial package. If I had voted against, it would have sent a signal that there was no point trying to provide reasonable benefits for the British in a negotiation of that kind because we would vote against it anyway. That was the reason why I did it. Having got the majority of what we wanted—although not all—it was right for me to take the position that I did.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Why has not the Minister admitted that the deal is a disaster for our fishing communities and represents a wholesale failure by the Government? Will he admit that he failed to meet the Government's negotiating aims, as set out by the Minister of State in October 1993, when he said that it was the Government's objective that

"Spanish and Portuguese fishing activities should be confined as closely as possible to their current pattern"

and that there should be no access to the Irish box? Will he confirm that the stocks in question are under immense pressure and that there should be less and not more fishing effort to conserve them? The fishing areas to which Spanish vessels will have new access stretch from the south-west of England right up to the north of Scotland and take in most of the Irish box. Will he acknowledge that those stocks are crucial to communities such as Newlyn and Falmouth in the south-west and to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland?

[Dr. Gavin Strang]

Cannot the Minister understand that it is no use him coming here—I address this remark to his hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), too—and saying that he was outvoted? The Government have had since 1985, when the Spanish terms of accession were agreed, to secure support in Europe for a just deal. He needed only to secure the support of two other member states, including a large one such as Germany or Italy, to block that deal. While the Government may have accepted the agreement, the Labour party has not. Alongside the fishing communities, we shall campaign against it.

Mr. Waldegrave: I remind the hon. Gentleman of two matters. First, between 1974 and 1979, when he was responsible for these matters, and before the days of qualified majority voting, the Labour party achieved no change whatever in the common fisheries policy. We had to wait until my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Walker achieved improvements in 1982, so the hon. Gentleman should be a little careful. Secondly, he seems temporarily to have forgotten that he supported accession. The Labour spokesman at the time, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), said:

"The Opposition do not welcome accession blindly, ignorantly or oblivious of the difficulties and anxieties."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 883.]

They knew exactly what it meant and they supported it. The hon. Gentleman now conveniently forgets that fact in a burst of rhetoric.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that stocks are under pressure—certain stocks are—and we shall hear from Sir Crispin Tickell's panel next week on that matter. Incidentally, the panel argues strongly for the maintenance and improvement of a common fisheries policy to manage stocks properly. The original position that we faced would have been intolerable. In entering the negotiations, my hon. Friend and I set out the maximalist position. If the hon. Gentleman negotiates by setting out in public his bottom line first, that is presumably why he and his hon. Friends achieved no improvements whatever when they were negotiating.

Although less good than I would ideally have liked, the deal maintains an Irish box and discrimination against Spanish fishermen. It has not, therefore, been welcomed in Spanish fishing communities, who know that they got much less than they wanted.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): My right hon. Friend will understand the concern always expressed about enforcing the rules. At the outcome of the Fisheries Council, what steps is he taking to ensure that Spanish fishermen play by the rules?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is on to the real issues, compared with the rhetoric that we heard from the Opposition Front Bench. The fact that a Commission inspectorate exists is another result of a British initiative under my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Walker. We obtained from the Commission the great improvement that the Spanish must now report back annually to the Council of Ministers to account for themselves. That will make a big difference. We must look at enforcement arrangements in Britain because another gain that we made was that coastal states have prime responsibility for enforcement off their shores. We shall therefore have the duty and right to do that, and we must ensure that we do it properly.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is the Minister aware that his excuse to the House this afternoon for not voting against a deal which he admits is unsatisfactory will baffle fishermen in the south-west, who feel betrayed, because it has given the wrong message that the British Government do not take that issue seriously? Having said that the deal discriminates against a group of fishermen around the western and south-western coasts, does he accept that it is now time to introduce a package for a modernisation and decommissioning scheme so that we invest in that industry in order to compete against the Spanish? The Spanish Government have invested vast quantities of our money in just such a scheme in their industry.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is right about decommissioning. We have a considerable package and, once we are near the end of the expenditure which we presently have in hand, we shall review it to see whether it is adequate. We shall return to that matter in due course because we have obligations to meet by the end of 1996. I have already told my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) why, although it may have been a pleasing and cheap gesture to vote against, it would not have been in the best interests of fishermen in this country if, having won considerable concessions, we still decided to play to the gallery at home without acknowledging that we had won benefits. That is not a good way of negotiating for the future and would have been shortsighted and irresponsible.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, despite speculation and scaremongering to the contrary, he has reinforced the position that Spanish fishing vessels will not be allowed into the vital fisheries of the North sea? Does he agree that that is yet another example of the fact that Scotland's interests are best served by being a full and equal partner in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is entirely right. It is hugely important to the British—perhaps in particular to the Scottish, but also to the English fishing industry and that in Northern Ireland—for the North sea ban on the Spaniards to continue, and it will. We now have them excluded from the Irish sea, the North sea and the Bristol channel. There is a continuance of the Irish box. That is why so many commentators in the Spanish fishing areas, who are doubtless under the same sort of pressures as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives, are saying—and I quote from one—that this was

"state terrorism against the Basque fishermen by the Spanish",

who had conceded so much to the British.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Will the Minister confirm that Scottish fishermen's organisations have already seen notices stating that they might incur further effort limitation as a result of the package? Does not he understand the anger of hard-pressed Scottish fishermen who will have to further limit their fishing simply to allow for Spanish access? Will he at least say that there will not be any effort limitation within the 12-mile limit because the Spanish will not be given access within that limit and that, therefore, it would not make sense to have effort limitation there?

Mr. Waldegrave: I can confirm that, on the 12-mile limit, another improvement on the original CFP which was won by the Government, there is no change. There is no extra effort limitation if there is no increase in effort. That seemed to be a reasonable position for us to take, and it is a huge improvement over the original proposals, which would have tangled everybody in bureaucracy all the time irrespective of whether there was an increase in effort. The arrangements that we made whereby fishing in the Scottish part, the northern part, of the Irish box is limited to the proportion of quota that can be caught there by Spanish fishermen is a great improvement for Scotland. It is another of the benefits that we obtained in the last hour or two of the negotiations and which influenced my final decision.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend go further than the answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) about the method of control? Will he make it clear that the Navy will look further at the ways in which control can be carried forward? Will he ensure that there are negotiations with local fishermen to determine methods by which that control can be carried out? Fishermen are mainly concerned that there will be cheating by the other side.

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is one of their principal concerns. In taking forward the mechanisms of what has to be carried through, it is absolutely essential that we consult the industry closely. If necessary, we shall also look at the effort that we expend via the Royal Navy on enforcement because that is a vital part of the package.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate the Minister on his ability, with his fine All Souls brain, to put the Spanish case so much better than they could when he returned from the Council. Will he will now turn that same intellectual subtlety to the problem of how Spanish vessels can be added to the already over-large fleets which are pressing on the shrinking stock in that area without some subsequent reduction in British effort?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is the only Opposition Member who has the right to say what he has been saying because he was the only Opposition Member to argue against accession, on fisheries grounds, at the time. The other Member who raised the issue at the time is now the distinguished diarist of *The Times*, Mr. Matthew Parris.

No increase in fishing effort is involved: there is no increase whatever in quotas. Under accession, the Spanish had the right to complete access to all the waters without discrimination. They have not got that, and it caused the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* to state that

"it is a long way from the full participation in the CFP sought by the Spanish Government. In the end, a Solomon's solution has been reached, which might be acceptable if González had not 'sold' the idea of Spain's access to all the Community fisheries as something which would not be foresworn."

He has foresworn it.

The agreement was a compromise which was not wholly satisfactory to us. I should have liked more, but against the background, which the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) knows well, it was a pretty good deal.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): Is it not clear that the House is now beginning fully to understand the difficulties that arise when European Union decisions are resolved by majority voting? Does my right hon. Friend agree that at the intergovernmental conference in 1996 there must be a clear statement of British policy that the present scope of majority voting will not be extended?

Mr. Waldegrave: There is a paradox here, is there not? We were keen on majority voting to establish the single market, which is a huge benefit to Britain. Incidentally, it also benefits British fishing. My right hon. Friend knows much better than I do that huge amounts of the fish landed at Newlyn go to Spain. Some £100 million worth goes there at much higher prices than would be available to our fishermen if our market was enclosed.

There are two sides to the question. The single market works in favour of our fishermen, in terms of the prices that they obtain and access to markets to sell their fish. I am not saying that the common fisheries policy has not meant costs for them, but Community membership has overall benefits for them.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Does the Minister accept that fishermen in south-west England and Wales will greet with disbelief his claim that there will be no long-term impact on quota? If 40 Spanish vessels per day are allowed into parts of the Irish box, there will clearly be a significant decrease in stocks.

Will the Minister recognise that one of the reasons why our European partners did not support Britain was our total failure in the past to meet the requirements of our multi-annual guidance programme by cutting our own fishing effort? Will he recognise that one way in which to deal with the long-term problem is to institute an increased decommissioning programme in south-west England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong. We have not yet reached the end of the decommissioning period, and we shall review it to ensure that we make the necessary progress. We have already committed considerable sums.

If we had not limited the number of ships with access to the Irish box to 40, the full 220 ships in the Spanish fleet—or whatever the figure is—could have been there. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that we have made considerable gains. If we had adopted a policy of simply standing back, vetoing everything and not taking part in negotiations, our fishermen might have faced the position that I have described.

If we had started from a completely different point—if the voting system had been completely different, and if our history since 1972 had been completely different—I would doubtless have been able to come back with something else. I believe, however, that—confronted with the existing position—I secured two thirds or more of what was a rationally possible objective for any negotiation: much more than was secured by any of the

[Mr. Waldegrave]

colleagues of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) between 1974 and 1979, when no changes whatever were made in the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the relief felt in Fleetwood at the continued exclusion of Spanish vessels from the Irish sea. Does he agree, however, that the important point is that quotas have not changed? He managed to achieve an increase in our enforcement around our coasts. That holds out the best prospect of keeping fishing effort within the stocks available round those coasts, rather than providing some vessels with specific access to particular seas.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is the point that I do not think the hon. Member for Pembroke took on board. Quotas—overall controls on the amount of fish caught—are a crucial aspect, as is making those quotas stick.

Once a common fisheries policy was established, it was at least theoretically inevitable that there would be free movement of fishing boats throughout the waters. Although we have limited that in relation to Spain, what matters is that proper quotas, properly policed, exist to protect fish stocks. We shall have to do better in future, and provide a better and better policed common fisheries policy.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the Minister accept that it is disingenuous to pretend that we shall be able to police the arrangements better than the Commission has policed them in the past? The Minister was not prepared to make a clear commitment in the House today in terms of money and resources for precisely that job. His shameful capitulation will wipe out many fishing groups—not only individual fishermen, but individual companies in the south-west—and they will be unable to accept what he has said. If they do not accept the arrangements, anarchy will follow. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to take responsibility.

Mr. Waldegrave: I hope that, in her search for soundbites and rhetoric, the hon. Lady will consider this. The Labour Government did not have to face qualified majority voting, and they got zilch: they got absolutely nothing. I think that it is irresponsible to talk as the hon. Lady did.

Apart from the rhetoric, however, the hon. Lady is on to a real point: policing is crucial. We are now talking about what will happen at the beginning of 1996, and we shall consider the resources that we have and the need for enforcement over the next 12 months.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Does not my right hon. Friend recognise that everything that he has said in his statement reinforces the view that the common fisheries policy has failed and that, instead of worrying about the position we started from, we should ditch it as soon as possible and start to regain the sovereignty of the seas?

Mr. Waldegrave: In all these issues, one of the least satisfactory things is to raise expectations that cannot be met. None of the main parties in the House—not the Labour party, of which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) is a member, nor the Liberal party—is committed to the destruction of the common fisheries policy, involving, I guess, withdrawal from the European Community, although the separate party below the Gangway may be committed to that. That is not a plausible thing to offer to people. What it is plausible to offer to people is a better CFP that is better policed. If we did not have the CFP, we would have to invent co-operation with our neighbours to protect fish stocks because fish stocks do not stop at lines drawn on maps. One must protect them co-operatively and one must have co-operative policing arrangements, which are beginning to be developed under the aegis of the European Commission and under the national enforcement arrangements of the riparian states—countries that have coastal waters.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I do not know whether the Minister has read the report of the debate in the European Standing Committee where concerns were expressed about the location and the number of fisheries protection vessels. Will he introduce to the House specific proposals, because we have vague talk at the moment, on how this country will take responsibility and beef up its fisheries protection vessels? Although they do a good job, there are not enough of them. Will he consult the fisheries organisations which, as we did in Committee, expressed concerns about the location of those vessels? They do not think that they cover the fisheries properly.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Member is on to the real point. We shall of course consult the industry organisations and we have been consulting them throughout. Many of their leaders were present in Brussels during the long negotiation period, and very boring it must be have been for them, too. We shall consider whether the effort expended by our admirable fisheries protection vessels is adequate. We have 12 months to do that and we shall discuss the matter both with the industry and with the Royal Navy.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his success in keeping Spanish fishing boats out of the North sea is warmly welcomed by fishermen in Essex and on the east coast? Does he accept that the criticism levied by the Spanish press at their own Ministers is perhaps a better tribute to his negotiating stance than some of the comments made by Labour Members?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. One of the Spanish fishing leaders said of his Government:

> "If they were going to give up like this there was no need to go to Brussels to negotiate. I thought they were going to be firm this time, that they were going to defend our fishing industry to the hilt as the President of the Government Felipe González promised, even to the extent of vetoing the enlargement of the EU. That is not what happened."

Galician fishermen spoke in exactly the same terms. They considered the outcome to be unacceptable and the discrimination against the Spanish fleet in relation to the Irish box to be intolerable. What my hon. Friend says is therefore right. Some of the perception of this matter depends on from which side of the water one looks at it.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On behalf of the fishermen of Newham—*[Interruption.]* Did the Secretary of State hear the item on the "Today" programme this morning about illegal fishing by European Union boats off the west African coast? What steps is he taking to end that practice? When does he think

that the fishermen of Europe will understand that, if they overfish, they will kill off not only fish stocks but their jobs as well?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree entirely with what the hon. Gentleman says. At one time, I compared this matter with arguments in the wild west of America about who was going to shoot the last buffalo. There will not be any fish unless there is proper conservation of stocks. I heard the item to which the hon. Member referred and I shall discuss with my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for fisheries whether the British can make some specific contribution to the issue.

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): There is no doubt that fishermen are demoralised and angry. Will the Government therefore introduce generous decommissioning proposals?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is right that we must have an adequate decommissioning programme. We have money in the budget for that. The grants are being taken up and we shall consider the matter before the end of the period because we have to meet obligations by the end of 1996. We shall reconsider the programme to see whether it needs any additions.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): May I add my voice to those who are calling for much tougher monitoring of the activities of the Spanish fleet generally? May I encourage my right hon. Friend to ignore completely the comments from the Liberal Democrats, whose policy is that every decision in Europe should be made by qualified majority voting? We would have decisions such as this imposed on us week after week.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is a little rum to be criticised by Liberal Democrat spokesmen when one is outvoted on something because we know that they want to abolish the veto in the places where it remains. That seems very eccentric and my hon. Friend is on to a strong point. He is also on to a strong point, as others have been, in relation to the policing of all this and the problem of history, which is something that has had to be faced by not only our fishermen, but I think that there will be reports from Canadian and Norwegian fishing waters about the behaviour of some of the Spanish trawlers. That is the real problem to add to the agreement and that is why we must look at enforcement properly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why should the Minister expect anybody to believe that the Government can police the seas when they cannot police the prisons?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am tempted to say that the matter of fisheries protection is in the hands of the Royal Navy.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there was considerable relief in Bridlington that he managed to negotiate to keep the Spaniards out of the North sea? We are grateful for that. Does he also accept that the present policy has failed because we have had quotas year after year and, if the policy had succeeded, fish stocks would have been recovering? Could there be a reason other than overfishing for the declining stocks in the North sea? Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is likely that there is a connection between the enormous increase in the seal population and the reduction in the stocks of cod? Is my right hon. Friend prepared to consider starting culling and putting the interests of the fishermen before those of the animal rights brigade?

Mr. Waldegrave: We have to stand on the scientific advice in these matters or we are lost. The main issues in the North sea have been overfishing—there is no question about that—and the need to keep a careful eye on the sea's pollution status, which I believe is now improving but which has probably contributed to the damage in the past. At the end of the day, we cannot get away from the fact that, as in the catastrophic situation that occurred off Newfoundland, overfishing has usually been the cause of a collapse of the fish stocks.

Prison Service

4.2 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about three recent events—the escape of three prisoners from Her Majesty's Prison Parkhurst, the disturbances at Her Majesty's Prison Everthorpe and the death of Frederick West at Her Majesty's Prison Birmingham. I propose to deal with each of those separate events in chronological order.

As the House will know, Frederick West was found hanging in his cell by prison officers at Winson Green prison in Birmingham at about 1 o'clock on the afternoon of 1 January. He was pronounced dead by the medical officer at 1.40 pm. He had been at the prison since 13 May. Throughout that time, the extent of his supervision was based on advice from two qualified psychiatrists and prison officers. He had on two occasions—13-14 May and 1-4 August—been under special observation in view of the assessed risk that he might do himself harm. Apart from those periods, he was subject to the observation appropriate to an inmate of his security category. He was seen daily by a doctor, including on the day of his death, when his behaviour did not give any cause for concern.

The inquest into Frederick West's death opened on 6 January, and it will be for the coroner to determine the cause of death. An internal Prison Service inquiry has been conducted. Its findings will be made available to the coroner.

I refer now to the disturbances at Everthorpe prison on Humberside. On the evening of 2 January, 68 prisoners on C wing refused to return to their cells after association and staff were forced to withdraw from the wing. Some prisoners broke through into the adjoining D wing. A barricade was erected to prevent staff from entering from the main prison corridor and some damage was done.

Other prisoners at the establishment played no part in the disturbances and by early morning half the prisoners on C wing had returned to their cells. Control and restraint teams were deployed shortly after 2.30 that morning to regain control, which was achieved just before 3.30 am with no injuries to staff or prisoners. Sixty-seven prisoners were transferred out of the prison during the morning of 3 January.

The prison was run as normally as possible during the day of 3 January. At about 7.30 that evening a member of staff was assaulted on B wing and prisoners on A wing indicated that they would refuse to return to their cells after evening association. For their safety, staff withdrew from A and B wings, which were then secured to prevent any possible breakout. At 1 am, control and restraint teams were deployed to regain control. B wing was secured a quarter of an hour later and A wing just over an hour later.

The member of staff who had been injured in the initial disturbance was taken to an outside hospital. He has now been discharged. There were no other staff injuries, but a number of prisoners sustained minor injuries. One hundred and twenty-four additional prisoners were transferred to other prisons, leaving 68 prisoners at Everthorpe.

The internal inquiry report has not yet been completed, but it has emerged that, while there was no single cause of the disturbances, the governor's determined efforts to curb the misuse of drugs in the establishment were an important factor. Tackling the drug problem in our prisons is a difficult task, but it is something that we must do. We cannot allow prisoners to deflect us from that task. Governors will always have my full support in carrying out that vital job. When the report is available, I shall place a summary of the findings and the conclusions in the Library of the House, together with a report of the action that is being taken in response.

Two of the wings at Everthorpe are already back in use and the remaining two will be ready for occupation next Monday. The cost of repairs is estimated at £130,000.

I am sure that the House will join me in condemning the behaviour of those prisoners involved in the disturbances and in congratulating Prison Service staff on the professional way in which they brought both disturbances to a speedy conclusion. The injuries sustained by one officer are a timely reminder of the difficulties and dangers faced by prison staff as they do their jobs. I am also very grateful to the police and other emergency services for their key role in bringing those disturbances to an end.

I deal now with the most serious event—the escape from Parkhurst prison on 3 January of two category A prisoners, Rose and Williams, and one category B prisoner, Rodger. At about 6 pm on 3 January, a group of 31 prisoners—including the three who subsequently escaped—were taken to the gym. At 7 pm the group were returned to their wings. Just after 8 pm a dog patrol discovered a hole in an inner security fence and a makeshift ladder leaning against the perimeter wall beyond. The alarm was raised and emergency procedures put into operation.

Richard Tilt, the Director of Security of the Prison Service, has been carrying out an urgent inquiry and last night I received his preliminary conclusions. They indicate that the three prisoners made good their escape using a copied key to open a door and gate. They then made their way to the welding workshop, using the key to open another gate en route and two more gates in the workshop. Once they were in the workshop, a ladder was assembled and tools and other escape equipment gathered.

As the House will know, all three prisoners were recaptured on Sunday 8 January and hon. Members will wish to join me in praising the success of the police operation. In their searches, the police were greatly assisted by the public and the House will, I know, wish to pay tribute to the islanders who displayed their characteristic fortitude throughout a very difficult period.

Mr. Tilt's inquiry highlights very serious deficiencies in procedural and physical security at Parkhurst. There were serious failures at local level by both management and some individual officers in carrying out basic security procedures in accordance with the Prison Service's own written instructions. Certain specific lapses on the night in question contributed significantly both to the failure to prevent the escape and to the length of time that elapsed before its discovery. That that could happen so soon after the publication of the Woodcock report into Whitemoor and so soon after the director general gave a clear and repeated message to governors and staff that security procedures must be followed is a cause for dismay.

Mr. Tilt also draws attention to the effect on security at Parkhurst of the extensive building works that have been under way since 1990. He considers that the decision made in 1990 to continue to hold category A prisoners at

the prison without additional security measures was mistaken. But he also concludes that none of the causes of the escape can be directly attributed to the rebuilding programme. In his view, although the capacity of local management to ensure that correct security systems and procedures were in place and being implemented effectively was reduced, the very existence of the rebuilding programme should have emphasised the need for strict adherence to basic security procedures.

The following remedial action has already been taken or is now being taken to improve security. It includes better monitoring of the movement of prisoners, especially the high-risk category A prisoners, and better supervision of their activities, adequate training of staff in the emergency control room, the presence of a governor at all times until prisoners are locked up at the end of the day, an increased dog team, improved lighting and cameras, the replacement of all compromised locks and additional alarm systems—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. These are important matters and the House must listen to the statement by the Secretary of State. If not, I shall find it difficult to call hon. Members who are barracking from sedentary positions.

Mr. Howard: I have outlined the immediate action that has been taken at Parkhurst. As the House knows, Sir John Learmont is already reviewing physical security and security procedures throughout the Prison Service in England and Wales, and Sir John, accompanied by Sir John Woodcock, who reported on events at Whitemoor and who is acting as his assessor, will visit Parkhurst this week. I have asked them to carry out an independent assessment of events at Parkhurst. They will have available to them the report made by Mr. Tilt, which they will be able to take into account. In view of the detailed information about security at Parkhurst in Mr. Tilt's report, it would not be appropriate for me to publish it. However, the examination of it by Sir John Learmont will ensure that it is independently reviewed. Sir John Learmont and Sir John Woodcock will not be bound by it and the scope of their inquiry will not be limited in any way. It will be open to them to bring forward proposals for early action without waiting for their formal report to me. The findings of their report will be published.

A separate disciplinary investigation into events at Parkhurst will commence as soon as the relevant police inquiries are complete. Two other actions are being taken. The present governor is today being removed from his duties at Parkhurst. Pending the outcome of a disciplinary investigation and any subsequent proceedings, he will not run any other prison in the Prison Service. When he has completed any assistance that he needs to give to the various inquiries now in hand, he will take up non-operational duties elsewhere. Six members of staff, including one of governor grade, will also be temporarily transferred to duties at other prisons. Both those actions are without prejudice to the outcome of the disciplinary investigation.

I refer now to my personal responsibilities as Home Secretary. I have made it repeatedly clear that I am personally accountable to this House for the Prison Service. I also have full responsibility for all policy decisions relating to the service. In his report, Mr. Tilt has not indicated any policy decision of mine that can be held to have caused in any way the breakout from Parkhurst. It will, of course, be open to Sir John Learmont to look at the issue afresh.

However, that is not the end of my responsibilities. It is also my clear duty to respond promptly to warnings about prison security. I can tell the House that I did, indeed, receive one warning about security at Parkhurst. Judge Stephen Tumim wrote to the director general on Friday 7 October to express his concern about the following aspects of security at Parkhurst: searching of cells, the metal detector portal, the operation of the X-ray machine in the gatelodge, supervision of visits and staff reluctance to confront visitors. I am placing a copy of Judge Tumim's letter in the Library of the House. Immediately on receiving that letter, I spoke to the Director General of the Prison Service and asked for a full report. I was subsequently assured by the director general on the basis of advice from the governor that all Judge Tumim's recommendations had been implemented.

It has also been suggested that I was warned of the need to install geophones. I received no such warning. At the time of the escape, geophones were in fact being installed around the perimeter fence at Parkhurst and will be in operation by April at the latest, when the relevant building work will be complete. The decision to install them was taken in April 1994. The prison service decided not to install geophones in the prison earlier because, as Ministers made clear at the time, the building work would have severely limited their effectiveness. It was the impact of those building works, which will enhance security, which dictated the timing of the installation.

Recent events are bound to have affected public confidence in the Prison Service and it will not be easy to repair the damage that they have done to its reputation. That damage can be repaired only by finding out exactly what went wrong in each of those events and taking all the action that is necessary to put things right. The inquiries that have been established and the general review of security under Sir John Learmont will identify what went wrong. I am determined to take the action that is needed to put things right and I am accountable to this House for that action.

Prisons are a vital part of any system of criminal justice. Prisoners have a right to be treated decently and we must do what we can to try to rehabilitate them. But all prisoners are in prison because a court has put them there to be punished for crimes that they have committed. That is why I want austere conditions in prisons. That is why I want privileges to be earned, not handed down as rights. That is why I want prisoners who have misbehaved to be properly disciplined for what they have done. The first duty of the Prison Service is to keep prisoners in custody. That must underline all its work. We must all learn the lessons that can be learned from those events and do everything possible to prevent them happening again.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Does not the Secretary of State understand that he has just made a statement to the House that wholly fails to meet public anxieties about the lamentable sequence of events that have beset the Prison Service in the three short weeks since he last had to make a statement to the House on the state of that service? During that period, Frederick West has been found dead in Winson Green prison, there have been riots on two successive nights at Everthorpe prison and three highly dangerous prisoners have escaped from Parkhurst.

[Mr. Jack Straw]

The seriousness of the escape from Parkhurst cannot be overstated. The public were put at enormous risk and it was with great relief that we all learnt that the men had been recaptured without injury to the public. I pay my own tribute to the police, to the prison officers and to the public on the Isle of Wight who were involved in the five days' search and above all, to the bravery of the special constable and the dog handler who arrested Williams.

I also wish to put on record our unqualified condemnation of the behaviour of the inmates who rioted at Everthorpe gaol and our tribute to the courage and tenacity of the prison staff and the police who had to deal with those two riots.

All that has come on top of the escape from Whitemoor prison last year and the catalogue of failure in the management of the Prison Service which was unearthed by the Woodcock inquiry. Does not the Home Secretary accept that he stands accused today of gross incompetence in the execution of his responsibilities, for the Prison Service, to the public and to the House?

First, does the Home Secretary accept that he personally and repeatedly failed properly to act on warnings that had been made about security problems in Parkhurst and Whitemoor by the—*[Interruption.]* no, no—by the board of visitors and the chief inspector of prisons? While the Home Secretary acknowledged today that the chief inspector of prisons, Judge Tumim, warned him in a note sent in early October of grave security problems at Parkhurst, does not he accept that, had proper action been taken on those warnings then, as Judge Tumim made plain on "The World at One" yesterday, the escapes could not have taken place?

Can the Home Secretary deny that his Department was warned for years by the board of visitors and the governor that Parkhurst required an electronic alarm system in its perimeter walls and fences which, I understand, all other high-security gaols have and that, had that system already been installed, it is highly probable that the escape would have been noticed immediately and not after a delay of two hours?

Secondly, is not it the case, as I shall demonstrate to the House, that the Secretary of State has compounded his failure to act on those warnings by a pattern of evasion and misinformation? Does he now acknowledge that he was wrong to claim, as he did in the *Daily Mail* last Thursday, that all Judge Tumim's recommendations on searching have been fully implemented? I note that in his statement today, all the Secretary of State said was that he had told the director general to ensure that the warnings were implemented and followed through and that he had been assured that they had. However, last Thursday the Secretary of State made categorical statements to the *Daily Mail* that those warnings had been acted on.

With regard to Whitemoor, does the Secretary of State now accept that what he told the House on 19 December about the contents of the 1992 and 1993 reports of the board of visitors at Whitemoor prison was demonstrably inaccurate and wrong? With regard to the 1992 report, the Secretary of State will recall that when I challenged him on whether he had followed up the warnings in the report about security, he said:

"The 1992 report made no reference to security whatsoever."

I have a copy of the 1992 report with me. Security is mentioned twice on page 2 alone. Even more significantly, page 32 of the report contains specific recommendations, addressed to the Secretary of State, about the need for him to ensure that the searching of all visitors to the prison was tightened. The report states:

"In our opinion, all visitors to prisons should be searched as a routine."

As a failure to search visitors properly was one of the major security lapses identified in the Woodcock report after the IRA prisoners had escaped, how on earth could the Secretary of State claim in the House on 19 December that the board of visitors report contained

"no reference to security whatsoever."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 1403.]

when demonstrably it contained a series of recommendations about security?

As for the 1993 report, the Secretary of State again implied in his earlier response to me that the security concerns in the 1993 report were only about the amount of possessions in cells and that those concerns had been dealt with by an addendum from the board of visitors submitted to him a few months later.

I have a copy of the addendum and the 1993 report here. The report contains a catalogue of complaints about security, not just about possessions in cells. It includes a charge that prison staff were being sent out of the prison on shopping trips not just to purchase

"Cromer crabs, fresh salmon and budgie seeds"

but, most alarmingly of all, to purchase "special hobby tools". We all know to what use the hobby tools were put in the hobby room by the IRA prisoners. The addendum, which I have seen, was just two pages long, and it did not deal with the majority of those security complaints, as Mrs. Paddy Seligman, then chairman of the board of visitors who wrote those reports, has made crystal clear in a letter that she wrote to the Secretary of State a week ago.

Does not the Secretary of State recognise that, whatever his intentions may have been when he made those statements on 19 December, many right hon. and hon. Members will have been wholly misled by what he said about the contents of those reports, and that he now owes the House an apology and an explanation of his lack of candour?

Thirdly, does the Secretary of State deny that he has continued to refuse to accept proper responsibility for this saga of ineptitude? Everyone except the right hon. and learned Gentleman is responsible for what has occurred. This Home Secretary is the "Not me, guv" Home Secretary.

Fourthly, since the breakdown in security at Parkhurst, as Judge Tumim made clear, is at least as grave as that at Whitemoor, on any scale, why has the Secretary of State continued to refuse to establish a wholly separate and fully independent inquiry into Parkhurst, as he did within 24 hours at Whitemoor? Does not he recognise that it was wholly inappropriate to put the director of security, Mr. Richard Tilt, in charge of the investigation, as any thorough examination by Mr. Tilt would have to involve the conduct of his immediate superior, Mr. Derek Lewis, the Director General of the Prison Service, and of the Secretary of State himself? In asking Mr. Tilt to conduct the investigation, he was effectively making the Prison Service judge and jury in its own cause.

Will the Home Secretary acknowledge also that the Learmont inquiry, which he announced on 19 December and which we supported, was a general one into the physical security of prisons throughout the country and that it cannot be a separate, free-standing inquiry? Indeed, I note that the Secretary of State was very careful not to suggest that the Learmont inquiry into general physical security would be an independent inquiry into events and into his responsibility at Parkhurst. Instead, he has very carefully not used the words "an independent, separate inquiry", but an "independent assessment of events"—a very different kettle of fish.

Moreover, confidence in that independent assessment of events cannot but be undermined by the precipitate decision of the Secretary of State to seek out and, in effect, discipline the prison governor and six staff before a proper independent investigation has taken place. Does not the Secretary of State's refusal to set up a fully independent inquiry show that he has much to hide, and speak volumes about his own culpability?

Fifthly, does the Secretary of State accept that policy decisions made by Ministers have a direct bearing on the crisis of confidence that Judge Tumim, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, now says is overwhelming the Prison Service? Why does not he recognise that his policy of privatisation and of the market testing of the Prison Service is wholly wrong in principle and has sapped the morale of the service? As the general secretary of the Prison Governors Association said at the weekend,

"month to month changes in government policy"

are adding enormously to the burden and stress of all those involved in running the service.

Does not the Secretary of State now recognise that the so-called clear distinction that he has made between policy and operations in the Prison Service has no foundation whatever in reality and that, by maintaining that fiction, he continues only to evade his own responsibility? Did not the Director General of the Prison Service let the cat out of the bag at the Prison Service conference last year? He said that

"if it's difficult it's classified as operational."

Is not another example of the use that the Home Secretary has made of that operational device the fact that he sought to rely on the verdict of his subordinate, Mr. Richard Tilt, to escape any responsibility for the events and circumstances surrounding the Parkhurst escape?

Will the Home Secretary now accept that he must take three steps to restore confidence in the prison system? First, he must abandon market testing and privatisation of the service—that is what the former Conservative Prime Minister called for at the weekend. Secondly, he should sit down with governors and prison officers to agree a programme for restoring morale and good order in the Prison Service. Thirdly, he must face his responsibilities for the good management of the service as well as for its policy, and make himself properly answerable to the House.

Does not the whole of the Home Secretary's statement serve only to underline what everyone in the country now knows—that the conduct of his office is characterised by consistent evasion of responsibility, exceeded only by his readiness to scapegoat others? His failure properly to direct and manage the Prison Service and to keep dangerous criminals under lock and key represents a failure in one of the most basic duties of any Government—to protect the safety and security of the public.

Mr. Howard: Of course, I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the seriousness of the events; no one takes such matters more seriously than I do. I am also grateful to him for his tributes to the work of the police and of the Prison Service.

I shall deal with each of the hon. Gentleman's criticisms in the order in which he made them. I do not accept for one moment the allegation, in which there is no substance, that I have failed to act on security warnings. I have set out and clearly explained the action that I took when I received the warning from Judge Tumim. Furthermore, the Tilt report does not conclude that the matters identified by Judge Tumim, important though they are, were in any way related to the escape from Parkhurst. I have also explained clearly the action taken on the installation of geophones. While building work, itself related to security, is going on, it does not make sense to install geophones because they cannot work effectively in those circumstances.

It is a measure of the desperation of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that he has sought to reopen matters related to Whitemoor. I do not accept for one moment the construction that he put on the answers that I gave on that subject. Moreover, it was open to all those concerned with the board of visitors and its reports to put their concerns to Sir John Woodcock in the context of his inquiry into what happened at Whitemoor. Presumably the matters in question were put to him.

No one has suggested that Sir John's report pulled any punches, and if he had thought that there was any significance in what appeared in the reports by the board of visitors, he would have referred to them in that context in his report, but there is no such reference.

Of course, I intend to ask Sir John Woodcock and Sir John Learmont to inquire fully into what happened at Parkhurst, and theirs will be a fully independent inquiry. Nothing will be ruled out of their purview, and they will not be constrained in any way. They are clearly entitled to consider to what extent, if any, questions of policy contributed to what happened at Parkhurst, and they are free to come to any conclusion that they think appropriate and desirable. I have stated that I intend to publish the findings, and there is no question of any kind of cover-up.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman sought to blame what has happened on market testing. To suggest that market testing can in some way explain, condone or excuse the failure to count prisoners out of the gym and into the wing, to ensure that cameras are properly pointed or to make sure that the duty governor is on duty at the relevant time, is to demean our proceedings. The hon. Gentleman ought to be ashamed of that suggestion, and withdraw it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I want a brisk exchange of questions and answers. A lot of hon. Members want to get in, and we have other business to conduct today.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for keeping me informed of events as they unfolded on the Isle of Wight within hours of the breakout occurring? Will he confirm to the House and reassure the people of the Isle of Wight that when he

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receives the full report, the safety of the people on the island will be paramount in his mind? Will he join me in congratulating Colin Jones, who spotted the prisoners on the run, and the chief constable and his men on the successful recapture? Does he consider that closed visits at prisons would obviate the necessity of searching visitors?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend look again at the fact that the British Medical Association refused to allow doctors to perform internal searches of prisoners, as they might prevent highly dangerous drugs from getting into prisons and compromising security? Does he agree that to call for his resignation every time a villain manages to perpetrate a crime against law and order is a villain's charter, and that it is those on the Opposition Front Bench who are the real enemies of law and order?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has taken a close interest in security matters in relation to prisons in his constituency on the Isle of Wight since he was elected to the House. I can certainly assure him that the safety of the islanders will be paramount in my mind when it comes to addressing the conclusions of the various reports. My hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to those who played a part in bringing those who escaped from Parkhurst back into custody.

I can tell my hon. Friend specifically that I have asked Sir John Learmont to look into the possibility of introducing closed visits as a matter of urgency. No stone will be left unturned in restoring security to our prisons.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): When did the director general assure the Home Secretary that all Judge Tumim's recommendations relating to security at Parkhurst had been implemented, and was that true? Does the Home Secretary at least concede that the policy of delegating the operation of prisons to the director general has not worked? Does not he ask himself why he must stand at the Dispatch Box displaying dismay and producing more rhetoric? There has been a great deal of policy and many innovations, but there is no proper control of security at the prisons. Is not that something for which he must take responsibility?

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman has distinguished himself in the past few days by popping up on just about every television programme acting as the mouthpiece of John Bartell. When he has a bit more experience in those matters, the right hon. Gentleman will realise that parroting the allegations made by Mr. Bartell is not a responsible way of addressing the issues involved.

I shall deal with both the right hon. Gentleman's questions in turn. I was given the assurances from the director general to which I referred within days of receiving the information from Judge Tumim. I looked at the matter, and I asked for those assurances. I raised questions on the assurances, and I was given them on the basis of what the director general had been told by the governor. Mr. Tilt is at present addressing in detail the question of the extent to which all those matters had in fact been implemented.

With regard to operational policy, there has always been a division between policy matters and operational matters. That has existed not only since the introduction of agencies—it has been recognised for years, and indeed for generations. I really do not see—the right hon. Gentleman ought to reflect on this—how, whatever structure or framework is in place, one can avoid a sensible distinction between policy and operational matters.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that what happened at Everthorpe was provoked by a deliberate crackdown by the governor, under the instructions of my right hon. and learned Friend and his Department, on many abuses within the prison, which related not only to drugs but to prisoners barricading themselves into their cells and not being properly supervised? Would not it be a sad day if a Home Secretary of any party was forced to resign from office because prisoners rioted in the way that we saw at Everthorpe in response to a proper crackdown prompted by public concern about the conditions in our gaols?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I note that the hon. Member for Blackburn also agrees. We do not yet know the full range of causes of events at Everthorpe, but it is reasonably clear that the crackdown on drugs was a prominent one. It is absolutely essential that that policy continues to be implemented. The misuse of drugs in our prisons is a disgrace. Effective action has to be taken to deal with it. Governors who take that action deserve not only my full support but the support of everyone in the House.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): As the Home Secretary says that he is accountable to the House of Commons only for policy matters and has carefully defined as not policy matters the lamentable series of events that he has described today, and as the arrogant and incompetent Mr. Derek Lewis, whom no fish and chip shop or whelk stall would accept behind its counter, has proclaimed on the radio the success of his regime, blamed everyone else in sight and found a scapegoat in the governor of Parkhurst, who is accountable to the House of Commons for the events that the Home Secretary has described? Where does the buck stop?

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman has rather uncharacteristically misunderstood the position. I am accountable to Parliament for the Prison Service. I am accountable to Parliament for all matters that are relevant to the Prison Service. I am responsible to Parliament for policy. The director general, according to the framework document, is responsible for operational matters. That is the distinction, but I am accountable to Parliament for the Prison Service generally. Since the director general became head of the agency, a great deal of progress has been made, not least in reducing the number of escapes, which has fallen by about a third during his period of office. That is an important matter to be taken into account. The Prison Service is clearly going through a difficult time. The director general is the best person to take it through that difficult time.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, as someone who has had responsibility for prisons in the past, I understand the difficulties and problems that arise from that responsibility? Along with a substantial number of people outside the House as well as people on the Benches here, I urge him to continue his policies in the most resolute way. It is absolutely essential for the security and safety of both the prisoners and the general public that we

have a Home Secretary who believes that he must pursue the policies that he is pursuing as firmly as my right hon. and learned Friend has shown that he is determined to do.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, far from accepting the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that we should stop pursuing the policy of privatisation in our prisons, particularly in prisons that hold convicted prisoners, we should accelerate that policy? It is one of the ways forward in ensuring that greater responsibility is accepted by all those who run the prisons and are accountable for them.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for her remarks. I believe that the policies that we are pursuing are in the interests of the country as a whole. I have no intention of being deflected from them. The private sector clearly has a role in operating our prisons. The indications so far are that it can bring new ideas and greater cost-effectiveness to bear in the provision of prison services. I shall continue to proceed in a measured and responsible way.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Judge Stephen Tumim's letter of December, which identified problems at Parkhurst, referred to one general problem—a staff reluctance to confront prisoners. Does the Home Secretary agree that such reluctance is particularly dangerous when it is manifested not by the prison officers on the wings, but by the management within prisons? Does he accept that the problem is not confined to Parkhurst but extends elsewhere? Will he consult the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), who has responsibility for prisons in Northern Ireland? A similar if not more dangerous position prevails in prisons in Northern Ireland and it should be dealt with. Does he agree that the police on the Isle of Wight were greatly assisted by their ability to publish photographs and names of wanted men without being accused of collusion?

Mr. Howard: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. He is right to identify a refusal to confront prisoners as a problem of enormous seriousness, whether it occurs in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland. It is certainly a problem that must be tackled. I am sure that I can learn lessons from what happens in Northern Ireland and perhaps the reverse can happen. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend disregard the personal abuse and party political claptrap of the Opposition? Is not it clear that the fault lay much lower down the line and that my right hon. and learned Friend has reacted vigorously and speedily to deal with that? The statement that he has made today has demonstrated that he is properly accountable to Parliament. Will the Learmont inquiry or possibly some other inquiry deal with the escape from Littlehey prison in my constituency, which is normally a very efficient and well-run prison, or will some other inquiry have to be set up? Does my right hon. and learned Friend think it rather odd that one of the prisoners who escaped was due for release in April? Does he agree that it is disturbing that one of the other prisoners who escaped was a psychopathic rapist sentenced to life imprisonment whom, curiously, the Parole Board released after only a limited time?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. There will be an internal inquiry into the escape from Littlehey, but if any lessons of general application to prison security can be learned from that escape, they will come within the remit of General Sir John Learmont's inquiry. I know that he will be interested in them. I agree with what my hon. Friend said about the oddity of someone whose release is almost imminent nevertheless escaping. These things happen in the Prison Service. I have a great deal of sympathy with the last point that my hon. Friend made about the circumstances in which parole was granted to one of the other prisoners who escaped.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the Home Secretary saying that if the geophones had been fitted, they would have been rendered useless by the building works? Is that his argument?

Mr. Howard: I do not claim any personal expertise in such matters. I am advised that geophones cannot be installed when extensive building works are under way because they do not work effectively in those circumstances. *[Interruption.]* That is partly because they are constantly set off by the building works and partly—to deal with the night time point, which I understand—because the building works tend to damage the geophones regularly in a way that impairs their effectiveness. It was on the basis of—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman is really interested in the matter and looks into it in detail, he will find that the decision to go ahead with the installation of geophones was taken in the first financial year for which I had any responsibility. So, I have no reason to give the hon. Gentleman anything other than the reason why the Prison Service did not install geophones while the building work was being carried out, which was that it acted on advice that they would not be effective while the work was under way.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): No fair-minded or reasonable person could think that the matters that my right hon. and learned Friend explained today are a reason for resignation. It is a fact, however, that the Director General of the Prison Service has presided over a regime so lax that, in recent months, he was prepared to sanction a convicted rapist taking part in the London marathon. In recent days, a prisoner has written to me from a prison in Devon—a convicted rapist, serving a six-year sentence—complaining about the fact that he has not had enough home visits. It is that degree of laxity that is upsetting the public. That laxity is ultimately the responsibility of the person in charge of operations, Derek Lewis. How much worse have matters got to get before, at the very least, he considers his position or has it considered for him?

Mr. Howard: I dealt with that question in my answer to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I have taken action to deal with one of the matters that my hon. Friend mentioned—the extent to which home leave and temporary release were being granted excessively and without adequate regard to the

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need to protect the public. New guidance has been issued to deal with that matter and it is having a significant effect.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): In view of the concern about security at Parkhurst, will the Secretary of State tell the House what correspondence about geophones has taken place since 1988, between the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and Home Office Ministers? Does he accept that he and the other Ministers are responsible for the fact that they were not installed prior to April 1994?

Mr. Howard: For the reason that I have already given, I do not accept that. It is perfectly true that my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) corresponded with my predecessors about that very matter. He drew to their attention the advantages that geophones offer. That matter was consistently considered and the conclusion to which I referred was reached—that, in view of the building works that were taking place, it would not have been sensible to install geophones. The key moment when building works will be complete will be April 1995 and it is expected that geophones will then be operational, their installation having been completed by that date.

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that most improvements in operational performance, for example, in health or hospital care, or rail and air travel, have followed regrettable breakdowns in operational service? With regard to the public interest, the key issue is the positive response that is made to remedial measures following breakdowns. Will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore accept congratulations, at least from Conservative Members, on the completely assiduous and open way in which he has kept the House informed about all the operational breakdowns and the concentrated and energetic way in which he is making certain that long-term remedies and improvements are put in hand?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. There is much truth in what he said, and the Prison Service ought to look upon this train of extremely unhappy events as an opportunity for it to reform and improve itself, to ensure that they are not repeated.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Home Secretary recall that, just before the Christmas recess, he used as his excuse the fact that previous Home Secretaries had experienced prison breakouts, so those were not a reason for his resignation? Does not he realise that none of the reputations of those Home Secretaries was anywhere near as tarnished as his, and that there will be no confidence in wide-ranging matters of law and order as long as he is so desperate to cling to office?

Mr. Howard: The people will view the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and its importance in helping the police, helping them bring criminals to justice, helping to convict people who are guilty of crimes and giving courts the powers to pass appropriate sentences, in rather a different light from the way in which the hon. Gentleman views it.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that I wrote to him on 2 January, after the second riot at Everthorpe, to suggest that he should oblige prisoners who have rioted and done damage to remain in their cells until they have repaired them? I see no reason why the taxpayer should do that for them. I was therefore pleased to receive an assurance that prison labour has been used to restore much of the damage. Does he accept, however, that I shall be very angry indeed— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Yes, I should be jolly cross if any of the 67 or the 124 prisoners who are to be transferred were sent to gaols such as mine in Lancaster, which is very well run and has a good governor and wardens and prisoners who co-operate, as that would be wholly unfair.

Mr. Howard: The last thing that I would want to do is to make my hon. Friend cross or angry. I assure her that any prisoner who can be found to be responsible for taking part in the disturbances at Everthorpe will be subjected to disciplinary action and possibly to prosecution. I hope that that meets the essential concern that lay behind her intervention.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The Secretary of State says that he is responsible only for policy. After the Strangeways riots four and a half years ago, the Woolf inquiry report made recommendations that most hon. Members on both sides of the House thought would transform the Prison Service. The Government and the then Home Secretary made a strong commitment to implementing Woolf. Since the right hon. and learned Gentleman became Home Secretary, the Woolf recommendations have been assiduously buried. That is policy, that is his responsibility and that is why we have the present crisis and why he should resign.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. If one studies some of the key objectives of the Woolf report, one finds that Lord Woolf attached great importance to reducing overcrowding. At the beginning of 1988, more than 5,000 prisoners were held three to a cell built for one, but now none is. In his report, Lord Woolf attached great importance to increasing the amount of purposeful activity in which prisoners engaged outside their cells. Such activity has increased by 12 per cent. during the past year. I do not think that Lord Woolf wanted his objectives to be achieved at the expense of prison security and the protection of the public and it is my job to ensure that the latter receive the priority that they deserve.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any evidence that the Prison Officers Association has been urging or instructing its members at Parkhurst not to co-operate with the police inquiry, or any other inquiry, into the escapes? If he has such evidence, what does he intend to do with it?

Mr. Howard: I have evidence that members of the Prison Officers Association were instructed not to co-operate with the police inquiry and that they did not do so. I am passing that evidence to Sir John Learmont and to the disciplinary investigation.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Is not it a fact that the Home Secretary has made repeated comments about boards of visitors at Whitemoor and Parkhurst? Their annual reports were an expression of deep concern about security and many other aspects of the day-to-day running of prisons. What credibility does he give to the annual reports

produced by those boards, in view of the countless hours that many of their members give during their day-to-day involvement in overseeing what is happening in ns? Can they have any confidence that the right h and learned Gentleman ever considers the work that they put in and looks at their annual reports?

Mr. Howard: I take those reports and the work done by boards of visitors very seriously. I spoke to the chairman of the board of visitors at Parkhurst this morning to congratulate and thank him and his board on the work that they have been doing, which is enormously appreciated. We are all in their debt as they work long hours on an entirely voluntary basis and perform an extremely useful task.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend is comforted today by the support from the Conservative Benches for the tough measures that he has announced and taken, contrary to the ridiculous press stories that we have been reading over the past few weeks about falling support on Conservative Benches. Will he ask those conducting market testing to explain why, since 1979, the prison population has gone up by 15 per cent., yet the number of prison officers has risen by 70 per cent? Is not it right for taxpayers to ask whether they are getting a good deal?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. The figures that he cited are important when considering the allegations constantly made about the effect of the increase in the prison population on conditions in prisons. They are telling figures. Even since 1989, the prison population has increased by about 1,000, yet the number of prison officers has increased by about 4,000. Those important facts are relevant to this debate and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to them.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Does the Home Secretary know that, after a tragically high number of suicides in Armley prison in my constituency, his Department issued new and full guidelines to monitor potential suicides? Given that another prisoner committed suicide in Armley prison on new year's eve, will he explain what has happened to those guidelines? Were they temporary? Are they long forgotten? They seem to be proving ineffectual in the whole system.

Mr. Howard: The guidelines are certainly in place, but I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman on the case to which he has drawn attention. It is a matter of great regret that last year saw an increase in the number of suicides in prisons. The number of suicides is greatly to be regretted. On the whole, our record is significantly better than that of most other countries, but that gives no cause for comfort and we take the problem seriously.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): We have heard much this afternoon about inquiries, but is not it time that we took Judge Tumim's advice and had a wide-ranging inquiry into how prisons are run? Are not drug dealing and bullying rife in virtually all prisons? While I accept my right hon. and learned Friend's concern to stamp them out, we need more than concern: we must take a fresh look at the problem. I do not ask my right hon. and learned Friend to take the words of Mr. Bartell as gospel, but, in taking that fresh look, will he take account of the views of prison officers who are operating prisons on the ground?

Mr. Howard: I take into account all relevant views and test them against the facts, which is the sensible way to approach matters. My hon. Friend is right to express concern about the misuse of drugs in prisons. One of the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which came into force yesterday, enables the random testing of drugs in prisons for the first time. I hope that a random testing programme will be implemented in prisons over the next few months.

A wide-ranging general inquiry is exactly what I asked Sir John Learmont to carry out in the aftermath of Whitemoor. It is principally into issues of prison security, but I have had a preliminary discussion with Sir John, who clearly takes the view that in order properly to address issues of prison security, he must look far and wide across the Prison Service at how it is organised, and I have not sought to discourage him in that approach.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Home Secretary admitted that last October Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons warned him of serious deficiencies in security at Parkhurst. Why, then, did he go on television and radio so regularly and deny that he had been given such warnings?

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is completely inaccurate and misinformed.

Mr. Enright: I saw you.

Mr. Howard: I have never denied that I received warnings from Judge Tumim. Indeed, I have always totally accepted that I received the warning from Judge Tumim. I have told the House today what action that I took on that warning. The hon. Gentleman can see for himself the terms in which the warning was issued because I have put Judge Tumim's letter in the Library. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's recollection is false.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): In respect of my constituent, Mr. Fred West, does my right hon. and learned Friend feel that an internally generated inquiry and report are likely to conclude that surveillance arrangements were adequate? Do not the facts speak for themselves? Did not Mr. West's son warn some weeks earlier that his father might commit suicide? Will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore ensure that the prison officers directly responsible are held accountable for what must surely have been negligence?

Mr. Howard: The evidence that we have so far, based on the internal inquiry, does not justify my hon. Friend's conclusion. However, all those matters will be looked at afresh and fully at the inquest, which will, of course, be held in public. All my hon. Friend's understandable concerns about what happened can then be explored, investigated and thoroughly assessed in that forum, which is the appropriate one.

Madam Speaker: We shall now move on.

Orders of the Day

Jobseekers Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, hon. Members will observe that a money resolution is applicable to the Bill. They will recall that, under the Sessional Order passed on 19 December, the Question on the money resolution must be put forthwith immediately after Second Reading. In those circumstances, I am prepared to allow hon. Members to refer to the content of the money resolution if they so wish during the Second Reading debate.

5.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Portillo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill provides for the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance, providing a single allowance to replace unemployment benefit and income support for unemployed people. The legislation before the House will improve incentives to work, remove barriers that discourage people from leaving benefit, and focus the efforts of jobseekers on looking for work.

We shall also focus the benefit on those who need it most. Those who have worked and made contributions will be entitled to benefit, regardless of their means, for six months. Two thirds of those who are unemployed leave benefit within six months. Those who are still unemployed after six months and those who do not qualify for contributory benefit or who have dependants will be eligible for the benefit on an income-related basis for as long as they need it without a time limit.

The Labour party's main attack on the Bill has been that the contributory benefit should be available for 12 months. But on this morning's "Today" programme, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was asked three times to say that a Labour Government would extend it to 12 months. Three times she dodged and ducked the question. She criticises and carps but will not say that she would do any different, were she in Government. That is not principled opposition but mere whining on the sidelines of politics.

This Second Reading debate provides an opportunity for the House to consider both the Bill and its context. The context is that, since December 1992, unemployment in Britain has fallen markedly. It is down by 500,000 to less than 2.5 million. The fall has been sharper in Britain than in any other major European Union country.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has no intention of introducing a new measure of employment, as suggested by Mr. Philip Bassett in *The Times*? Has he any idea where those stories have come from?

Mr. Portillo: I am happy to confirm to my hon. Friend that I have no intention of introducing any new measure of employment as was proposed in *The Times*. My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. A fax has come into my possession which was sent by Mr. Philip Bassett to Mr. Ed Milliband. It contains the draft of an article alleging that the Government were thinking of introducing a new measure of employment, and it was sent to Mr. Milliband to be cleared and vetted. Mr. Ed Milliband is the research assistant of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

It is perfectly clear that Mr. Philip Bassett of *The Times* is in the habit of taking stories suggested to him by the Opposition and submitting them to the Opposition for vetting before they are published in *The Times*. Not surprisingly, in his fax Mr. Philip Bassett says:

"I'd be grateful if you could of course keep it under your hat."

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): How did the Minister get the fax?

Mr. Portillo: I got it because it was inadvertently sent by Mr. Philip Bassett not to the fax number of Mr. Ed Milliband, but to that of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim).

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): Before the Secretary of State goes any further down this disgraceful line of argument—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members are interested in the facts I will put them to the Employment Secretary and he can confirm them. He should apologise to Philip Bassett because there was no question of him sending that material for me to approve it, vet it or check it. I ask the Minister to accept my assurance on that. Mr. Bassett simply sent it to me because it was an exclusive and he asked me to comment on it for the following day's paper. The Secretary of State is clearly so desperate that he is clutching at straws. Why does not he address the real issue of the unemployment that he has created? He is a disgrace. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It is time that the House settled down.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady doth protest too much. The fax states:

"Ed—This is a copy of what I've written so far, though I may fiddle about with it later. But it will be something like this. It mostly looks at the position, rather than the politics."

The Times does not fax copy in advance for me to comment on, but apparently it does so for the Labour party.

It is time to return to the serious subject of unemployment because 2.5 million people without work is far too many. The Government never forget that unemployment is a waste. Worse than that, it is a cause of great unhappiness and difficulty. Therefore, reducing unemployment is a high priority for the Government.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): The Secretary of State says that unemployment is a waste. In that case why does he think that it is sensible to penalise the unemployed by cutting their benefit? A quarter of a million people will be worse off as result of the cuts, but they are only the victims of the economic cycle. It is not their fault that they are out of work but the fault of economic forces and the Government's incompetence.

Mr. Portillo: A large number of people will be better off because in future they will get the back-to-work bonus. People will benefit from the £10 allowance that will be available to couples before any benefit is deducted in

respect of their earnings. We are prepared to change the welfare system so as to update it. The hon. Lady's party is afraid to change anything or to admit to any policy.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will the Minister comment on the Bill's provision which would mean that if a newly unemployed person took part-time work benefit would be deducted pound for pound if that person earned more than £5 a week? Will he contrast that with the case of Mr. Bryan Townsend, the chairman of Midlands Electricity? He gave up the job and got a pension of about £2,000 a week. He then went back to the job part time and he gets £165,000 a year for that on top of his pension. Does not the right hon. Gentleman see a contradiction in the way in which the Government whom he represents treat people who already have money compared with those who have nothing?

Mr. Portillo: The Government will treat everybody equally. We are concerned to see that people make their way back into work, possibly by climbing the ladder of part-time work. That is why the Bill introduces a back-to-work bonus which will encourage people to build up a credit of the benefit that is deducted from them when they take part-time work. They will be able to have a lump sum of up to £1,000 when they leave benefit to go into full-time work. The hon. Gentleman should support that by voting for the Bill.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): We are concerned about the unemployed and welcome the fact that in the past two years unemployment has been decreasing. Four years ago the Select Committee on Social Services drew attention to the place of carers and the concept of care for them. As one who has been aware of their problems over the years, will the Minister take the opportunity, through the Bill, to examine the case of carers who have been penalised after having to leave work to look after their parents and others, because when a carer's parents die the carer is not entitled to unemployment benefit? Will the Minister look at the scheme to see how such people could be looked after?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point for which there is much sympathy in the House. I do not want to attempt an off-the-cuff answer. In Committee hon. Members will want to look at that matter. In respect of sanctions, the position of carers will be different from that of other people. They will be in the protected group, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that assurance, although I know that it does not go as far as he would like me to go.

Higher public spending is not the answer because we cannot spend our way out of unemployment. Higher taxes or borrowing and higher interest rates and inflation would result and those would destroy jobs. The Labour party has to learn that real demand in the economy cannot be increased by increasing public spending. However, it can be done as the Government are doing it—by providing the conditions for sustained recovery.

Underlying the Bill is the recognition that in itself economic growth is not enough. The feature of European unemployment over recent decades is that it has risen from one recession to the next. Even in periods of recovery the totals have not fallen very far. We must sort out the structural problems that impede job creation or diminish the incentives for unemployed people to take work.

I want to secure through the Bill and other measures economic growth that brings more jobs and lower unemployment, not economic growth that improves life only for those who have work but does nothing for those who do not. We have to make it as easy as we can for one person to offer work to another. Recently that has meant resisting a number of proposals from Brussels which were fully supported by Walworth road. Those proposals would have made it more expensive to employ people and would have imposed on employers liabilities and obligations that would be bound to make them wary of taking on new people.

Another part of what we have to do is to examine incentives. Most people without a job want more than anything else to be able to work. The Bill is designed with those people in mind and they have nothing to fear from it.

Ms Harman: How does it help people and give them an incentive to get back to work if, when they lose their jobs, the Government cut the help with mortgage interest payments?

Mr. Portillo: I had hoped that the hon. Lady was rising to say what policy she intended to reverse. My colleagues and I in the Government are addressing a problem on which there is meant to be agreement across the House. How do we find a benefit system that the country can afford—a system that is equitable?

The hon. Lady speaks of relief for mortgage interest payers. She knows that such relief is not universal today, and that it is not applicable to people who receive unemployment benefit. It is available only to those in receipt of income support. In future, people can make their mortgages secure by taking out insurance which is available in the private sector. The hon. Lady, however, would rather struggle on with a state system which is inadequate, and which is misleading people into believing that their mortgages are protected rather than placing any reliance on the private sector.

Why, when people are able to protect their mortgages with insurance, should the taxpayer of all people be responsible for insuring those mortgages? Has the hon. Lady no concept of individual responsibility—of the fact that, if someone can afford to take out a mortgage, that person should also consider how to protect the payments? The hon. Lady believes in the Commission on Social Justice and in the new welfare state; why will she not admit that, in one corner of the welfare state, there is an opportunity for individuals to take some responsibility? Why will she not admit that the taxpayer should not be the first port of call? The hon. Lady is, as ever, silent.

Over the years leading up to the Bill, we have examined a range of policies to see how they affect motivation, and how they have helped or hindered people in their quest for independence and the ability to provide for themselves. We reformed income-related benefits and introduced family credit: our objective was to ensure that more people would be better off in work than receiving out-of-work benefits, and that those with families would be encouraged to take and keep jobs.

We have recently introduced, or announced, further changes to ease the way back to work. It is now possible, on family credit, to spend up to £40 a week on child care without affecting entitlement to benefit. We have also looked hard at the help that we can give people to help them over the "job hump"—the difficulties that they face

[Mr. Portillo]

when they find a job after being out of work for a long time. We have introduced the jobfinder's grant, which puts cash in people's hands to help them with bus fares, clothing or the tools that they need for the new job.

We have adjusted the benefit system to ease the transition into work. People who find a job after a long period of unemployment will receive the same amount of housing benefit for the first four weeks of work as they received when they were out of work. We are also tackling employer discrimination against the long-term unemployed. We have experimented with workstart—payments to employers who take on the long-term unemployed to encourage them to give those people a chance to prove themselves. The Bill extends that idea by waiving for one year the national insurance contributions that employers would have to pay on newly recruited employees who had been out of work for two years or more.

Sir Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, but I shall then need to make progress.

Sir Ralph Howell: Given the success of workstart, under which the state saves at least £30 a week for every person who is employed, why has the system not been made universal?

Mr. Portillo: Let me explain an important difference to my hon. Friend. With workstart, we are giving long-term unemployed people who would otherwise face discrimination a chance to prove themselves in the world of employment. I do not believe that spending public money creates more jobs; it cannot do so, because that money is raised from taxes that other people pay. I do believe, however, that we can help to provide opportunities for people who have been out of the labour market for some time—people whom employers would otherwise not be willing to consider. That is good for those people, and good for the performance of the labour market; but I do not draw the conclusion that we can endlessly spend money and make the state the employer of last resort. I shall explain that more fully later.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Portillo: Yes, but this will be the last time.

Mr. Campbell: Is it true that a bonus will be given to people who work in careers and dole offices as an incentive to remove claimants from the dole queues?

Mr. Portillo: I am pleased to have the opportunity to say that that is not so, although it has been alleged that there will be a target for sanctions.

The Bill introduces a further incentive to help people into jobs—the back-to-work bonus. Income-related benefits are paid to unemployed people to help them when they have insufficient income. Naturally, if they secure part-time work, the money that they earn reduces their need: that must be reflected in the payment of less benefit.

Part-time work, however, is sought by some as an effective ladder leading back to full-time work, and is valuable in maintaining morale while that search goes on. We should therefore encourage people on benefit to take part-time jobs if they are more readily available than full-time jobs. The back-to-work bonus will allow people to build up a credit equal to half what they lose in benefit, and to receive a lump sum of up to £1,000 when benefit is replaced by a full-time job.

Having taken those and other steps to help people back into work, and to ensure that they can be confident of being better off when they are in work, we must now examine the conditions of entitlement to benefit. Let us be clear about the principles. Benefits are paid to help people to deal with contingencies that prevent them from providing for themselves—retirement, disability, sickness or involuntary unemployment.

Since the original introduction of unemployment insurance, it has always been understood that benefit is payable only to people who want to work but cannot. It was presumed that such people would be seeking work, and would take it if it became available. Beveridge was concerned by the effect of the availability of a cash benefit on people's self-reliance, and it was explicit in his report that benefits for unemployed people should be paid only to those who were seeking work. That report stated:

"The correlative of the State's undertaking to ensure adequate benefit for unavoidable interruption of earnings, however long, is enforcement of the citizen's obligation to seek and accept all reasonable opportunities of work, to co-operate in measures designed to save him from habituation to idleness, and to take all proper measures to be well."

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Secretary of State also tell the House that, although Beveridge carefully laid down those safeguards for public money, he added that claimants who fulfilled the conditions would receive benefit until they obtained jobs?

Mr. Portillo: Income-related benefit is available for as long as people need it.

Mr. Field: The Secretary of State is wrong. Beveridge laid down that unemployed people would be able to draw national insurance benefit until they found jobs, provided that they fulfilled the conditions that the right hon. Gentleman has just read out.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware that that has ever been accepted. Certainly it has not been accepted in the living memory of any Opposition Member. National insurance benefits for unemployed people have been time-limited for as long as any Opposition Member can remember. I admit that the time limits have changed from time to time, but the benefits have not been in perpetuity during the lifetimes of Opposition Members.

The principles that I have read out remain good and valid today. No one has a God-given right to decide to be idle and to live off others, and there is no novelty in saying that today. The taxpayer has every right to expect those seeking work to do so with vigour, and to demonstrate their desire to work by taking actions that are likely to improve their ability to find and hold down jobs—attending courses, undergoing training or actually working in programmes of activity financed by the Government.

To describe that as "workfare" strikes me as loose talk. To me, "workfare" means that the state will be the employer of last resort, committing itself to provide work for any who are without it. That implies a bigger role for the state than I am willing to contemplate. I do not shy

away from saying that financial provision is there for those who need it because they cannot support themselves, but they must be able to demonstrate that by their willingness to work. That can include being required to take work that is offered to them on penalty of losing their benefit; if that spells workfare to some, so be it.

I aim to see the world as it really is. Much of what we have already done sets out to tackle the practical disincentives to taking a job which real people face. That is realism. We must also be realistic, however, about the ways in which the system can be abused and no good is done to anyone by ignoring that problem.

The Bill makes explicit much that has until now been implicit. It re-establishes clear principles, in particular the clear conditionality of benefit that was there at the creation of the welfare state. At the heart of the Bill is the proposed jobseeker's agreement, under which the jobseeker will make a commitment to pursue actions that will be most likely to lead to a job. The Employment Service will provide the opportunities that will be of benefit to the jobseeker.

The jobseeker's allowance will provide a better service for unemployed people. There will be, as far as possible, a single set of rules and a single claim form. It will, generally, be delivered from one office—the local job centre.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden) *rose—*

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because he is so distinguished, but I must make progress.

Mr. Dewar: I positively melt, but I shall recover. My question to the right hon. Gentleman is short. He said that the jobseeker's agreement is the core of the Bill and obviously, therefore, it is an important change. Will he please explain to me precisely how the new powers in relation to agreements, duties and obligations of both the applicant and the Employment Service have changed the existing position?

Mr. Portillo: The most important change is that the signature on a jobseeker's agreement will be necessary for the triggering of a claim. The claim will not be valid without there being a jobseeker's agreement. I think that I have answered the hon. Gentleman directly. That is an important change. No claim will exist until a jobseeker's agreement has been signed.

The Employment Service has developed a range of active employment measures that experience has shown—

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Sign here.

Mr. Portillo: People have been signing on for as long as any hon. Member can remember. They will sign a jobseeker's agreement. They will commit themselves to a programme of activity and the Employment Service is giving to them the range of opportunities that is available. I do not see how the hon. Gentleman can object to any of that.

The Employment Service has developed a range of active employment measures which experience has shown can dramatically improve a person's chances of getting a job. Last month, the service helped 174,000 people—a new record—to get into jobs. It assesses people's needs at restart interviews—nearly 4 million each year. People may then be referred to job clubs, where nearly half are successful at finding work, or to the job interview guarantee scheme, where again nearly half find a job. The job plan workshop scheme and new restart courses have enabled more than 90 per cent. of attendees completing the course to apply for a job, employment, training programme or other sort of help. Of course, there are also the training programmes provided through the training and enterprise councils, including programmes tailored for people with disabilities or other special needs.

Many of those programmes have been tried first on a pilot basis to ensure that we maximise their effectiveness before they are used to help people on a national scale. We want to have the flexibility to try new ideas with pilot schemes. The Bill has, therefore, a carefully defined power to run local pilot schemes, but it rules out piloting any trial schemes that would involve reduced rates of benefit.

With the very substantial improvement that the Employment Service has made in the help that it can offer, we are in a better position than ever to tailor effective assistance to each person's need. The Employment Service has a track record of service and of success in helping people into work.

The vast majority of people will, therefore, accept the jobseeker's agreement as a fair and just agreement, but the Bill provides a back-up power. It enables the Employment Service to issue a direction to a person to undertake activity that reflects the person's needs and abilities. That will be necessary only if the jobseeker refuses to do reasonable things aimed at him becoming more employable and sanctions would follow only if the direction were ignored.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: No. I must make progress.

Of course, directions and sanctions must be reasonably applied. Jobseekers must not be subject to arbitrary demands and there must be safeguards. There will be. Decisions on sanctions will be subject to independent adjudication and to the same appeals structure as we have today.

Some people who lose their benefit because of sanctions will be able to claim hardship payments. Vulnerable groups such as the ill, pregnant women, people with children or people with caring responsibilities will be protected. Healthy, childless people will have no access to hardship payments if they fail the basic conditions of entitlement and they will have no access to hardship payments for two weeks if they break rules once on benefit.

The economy is generating jobs and we are making sure that unemployed people get the chance to take them. We are willing to make changes to our system of provision because the welfare state must be kept up to date. The Labour party claims to be concerned with reform and with the critical question of affordability. The welfare state costs every working person in this country £15 each working day. Yet the Commission on Social Justice proposes additional expenditure of £7 billion a year, which would require higher taxes and would destroy jobs. Conservative Members understand that the business of government requires decisions and requires choices. The hon. Member for Peckham complains about the Bill, but her refusal to commit her party to reverse it shows that Labour is not serious but vague, vacuous and dishonest.

[Mr. Portillo]

The Government have three main aims in the Bill—to help people into jobs, to deliver a better service to people while they are unemployed and to achieve better value for the taxpayer. It is part of our policy to encourage jobs through economic policy and through labour market reforms. The Bill is about jobs, about supporting people while they look for work, about encouraging them to compete for jobs and about helping them into jobs. For all those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

5.35 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): The Bill demonstrates just how out of touch the Government have become with the concerns and interests of ordinary British families. Insecurity among the work force is increasingly recognised as a central economic and social problem. Even the deputy chairman of the Tory party, John Maples, admitted in his secret memorandum that people feel insecure at work. They feel constantly under threat of losing their jobs and believe that the Government are doing nothing to help them, yet the Government have not listened and will not learn.

Despite the somewhat warmer words of the Secretary of State for Employment—I thought at one point that he was on the brink of a U-turn—we must focus on the Bill's provisions because, of course, the Bill will not help to reduce unemployment or to put people back to work. It will make people who are out of work, and even people who are in work, feel more insecure and more fearful.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): If the hon. Lady feels strongly that the Bill is wrong, why will not she commit herself to reversing it if the Labour party come to power?

Ms Harman: Our particular concern is the deepening of the poverty trap and the cut in the period of non-means-tested unemployment benefit from 12 to six months. I shall not anticipate the contents of our election manifesto in some two and a half years. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we shall introduce a comprehensive range of measures that will deal with the problem of the poverty trap and will allow people to move from welfare to work and to undo the damage that has been done. The Bill does damage and deepens the poverty trap. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the deepening poverty trap, like Labour Members, his response should be to vote with us against the Bill tonight.

Unemployment is not, as the Government so often imply, a problem of a minority of lazy people refusing to work. It is a major problem. The Department of Employment's own figures show that nearly 11 million people—40 per cent. of the work force—have been out of work at some point in the past five years. Many of the remaining 60 per cent. who have been continuously in work live in households with people who have been unemployed. The families who have not been affected in some way by unemployment, which has swept through this country, are a rapidly diminishing minority. That is why the Government's attack on the unemployed in the Bill is of concern to people far beyond those currently on the dole.

For once, the Secretary of State for Employment has restrained himself from delivering his usual tirade about how excellently the economy is doing and how excellent the employment prospects of people are. Perhaps at last he recognises how abysmal the Government's record is.

I remind the House of what the Secretary of State failed to report as the background to the Bill. Britain has lost 40 per cent. of its manufacturing employment over the past 15 years and we are the only one of the top seven industrialised nations that has seen no rise in employment since 1979. The United States has seen a rise of 21 per cent., Japan a rise of 18 per cent. and Germany a rise of 8 per cent. The Government's record on employment creation is 17th out of 21 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That is a record of which the Government should be ashamed.

Unemployment is still almost 1 million higher than it has ever been under any post-war Labour Government. Unemployment among the unskilled is still rising while the Government are still cutting training for the unemployed. Long-term unemployment remains at almost 1 million—39 per cent. of all those unemployed. Our record on long-term unemployment is the second worst among the G7 countries. The number of very long-term unemployed—over two years—is still nearly 500,000; that is more than 100,000 higher than it was two years ago.

That is the real background to today's debate, not the fairyland that is so often painted by Ministers. The truth is that the Government have failed on unemployment and, as a result, we have a work force who are fearful and insecure. It is against that background that the Government propose the jobseeker's allowance.

The Secretary of State said that the heart of the Bill is the jobseeker's agreement. Of course it is not, and he does not believe that. The central measure in the Bill is to cut the entitlement to unemployment benefit from 12 to six months. That did not warrant much of a mention in the Secretary of State's speech, but it is clear that that measure will have the harshest and most dangerous impact.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Is the Labour party prepared to reverse that—yes or no?

Ms Harman: The hon. Lady failed to listen to my previous response. I have said clearly that I will not anticipate measure by measure what will be in our manifesto in two and a half years, and the hon. Lady would not expect me to do so. I hope that she will vote with us tonight, because I can assure her that we will have a comprehensive welfare-to-work programme, and we will vote against the deepening of the poverty trap that will occur as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford) *rose—*

Ms Harman: I shall give way in due course.

That cut in entitlement will make thousands of people much worse off. *[Interruption.]* I have answered the question twice. Hon. Members who are interrupting from a sedentary position about our manifesto promises should reflect on whether they have kept any of the promises contained in their manifesto. One thing that will be different in our manifesto is that we will keep our

promises. Perhaps Conservative Members will pipe down about manifestos for a few moments and reflect on their own betrayal.

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend has seen the Conservative party's manifesto from the last election. Is there any reference to halving the amount of contributory benefits for the victims of the recession? Is that in the manifesto on which the Conservative party won the election?

Ms Harman: Of course the Government did not put in their manifesto that they would cut unemployment benefit or that they would increase national insurance contributions. In fact, quite the opposite: the Government promised that they would not cut benefits and help for the unemployed and that they would not increase national insurance contributions. The Bill does precisely those two things.

Mr. Portillo: I am a reasonable man. I understand that the Opposition cannot be expected to tell us every jot of what will be in their manifesto. Manifestos are published close to elections. However, the hon. Lady is launching an attack on the Bill. She said that her central onslaught is on the reduction of the contributory principle from 12 to six months. She said that that is at the heart of the Bill. She said that it is iniquitous and that she hates it. Therefore, she must be able to say that she would reverse it, otherwise she does not have a leg to stand on. That is the fact—she does not have a leg to stand on.

Ms Harman: It is interesting that the Secretary of State is spending less and less time trying to justify his proposals, because he obviously does not believe in them, and is spending more and more time asking us what we intend to do when we form a Government. He will find out what we intend to do. He will see our comprehensive welfare-to-work proposal in our manifesto. He will then be watching us from the Opposition Benches as we implement programmes that end the poverty traps that he has created.

Make no mistake, this cut in entitlement will make much worse off the thousands of people facing the very real money worries that come with unemployment. The Government have admitted—and their own figures show—that at any one time 90,000 people will lose entitlement to benefit altogether because they are not entitled to means-tested jobseeker's allowance. That is not necessarily because those people are well off or can afford the cut in income; they may be disqualified from benefit because they have a partner in work on a low income or because they have savings or redundancy payments just above the £8,000 limit.

Let us look at the example of an unemployed man with a wife who works more than the 24-hour threshold or who has just received a redundancy payment over the £8,000 limit. Under the old system, during the first 12 months of unemployment, based on national insurance contributions, he would have received £2,300. Now, despite the increase in national insurance contributions, that figure will be cut to under £1,200—a cut of £1,100. That is a serious and shameful cut.

The pernicious nature of the Bill is not confined to the proposal to means-test after six months instead of 12.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): Those are precisely the circumstances in which those with mortgages who find themselves unemployed do not at present receive any help. That is the system that the hon. Lady wishes to maintain. Why?

Ms Harman: We are saying that the Government are putting up national insurance contributions—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but people think that this is a serious matter. The Government are putting up national insurance contributions, they are cutting unemployment benefit and, at the same time, introducing new measures to cut the help to home owners who become unemployed. We think that that is wrong.

Our objection to the Bill is not confined to the proposal to means-test after six months. Entirely characteristically, the Government have used the Bill to smuggle in a raft of other measures that will hit hardest those who can least afford it. The Bill will cut the level of benefits paid to young people. In addition to cutting the length of time for which young people can claim, the level of contributory benefit that young people receive will be cut by one fifth. For a young unemployed person out of work for 12 months, the benefit will be cut by at least £500 over that year, even where he or she is still entitled to means-tested benefits.

The Bill will cut the benefits of those with partners who are unemployed. The current rules provide for contributory payments for dependants, but the new rules will mean that from day one payments for dependants will be means-tested. For example, under the current system, a man with a non-working wife who has savings or redundancy payments just over the limit receives £3,822 in the first 12 months of unemployment. As a result of the earlier switch to means testing and the new rules on dependants, that will be cut to £1,200—a reduction of over £2,500—despite the fact that national insurance contributions will have gone up.

What it all adds up to is that, at any one time, 250,000 people will have their benefit reduced or cut altogether. That is what the Bill is about. In addition to the cuts in benefit, unemployed home owners will face the extra problem of mounting debt from mortgage interest payments. It is clear to everyone that the Bill will inflict misery on many unemployed people, but what justification has the Employment Secretary offered? He has effectively offered three justifications, all of which turn out to be bogus.

The first justification, which reflects the true nature of the Employment Secretary, is that benefits need to be made less generous to persuade the unemployed to get out and find work. He believes that the unemployed are a feckless group who refuse to look for work. He said:

> "Too broad a benefit system can undermine the morale of those who receive help."

The past 15 years are a testament to the failure of that strategy. The Government have consistently cut benefits since 1979, but unemployment is now more than double the 1979 level. If cutting benefits put people back into work, we would have full employment by now. Evidence from abroad also shows that there is no simple equation that proves that cutting benefits means that people find work. It does not work like that.

The vast majority of the unemployed are not out of work because they are work-shy. They are out of work for three reasons: jobs are not available; they cannot earn

[Ms Harman]

enough to make it worth moving from benefit into employment; or they lack the skills for existing vacancies. That is the true position.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough) *rose—*

Ms Harman: I shall not allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene. He is clearly going to ask about our manifesto, which I shall tell him about in two and a half years' time. I shall instead read what the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth)—

Mr. Sykes *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has made it clear that she is not giving way.

Ms Harman: The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said:

"If we are to reduce dependence, what really matters is the availability and accessibility of adequately paid jobs."

The hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) tried to intervene earlier and I shall now accept his intervention if he will indicate to me in advance that he intends to apologise to his constituents for the fact that in the past five years unemployment in his constituency has risen by 137 per cent. If he does not intend to take the opportunity to apologise afforded by my allowing him to intervene, I shall not give way. Will he apologise to his constituents for his broken manifesto promises?

Mr. Duncan Smith: I have no intention of apologising. The hon. Lady attacked the Government because she believes that they are cutting benefits, but at the same time she says that there is a 50:50 chance that a Labour Government would accept that. I am not asking her to explain, but will she say whether she believes that social security spending is too high or too low?

Ms Harman: That is a very easy question to answer: social security spending on unemployment is far too high. The Government have pushed it up, not by making benefits more generous but by making more people unemployed. The Government's failure to understand that the difficulties with public finances have been created by their economic failure means that they cannot hope to solve the problem.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: No.

Far from helping people back to work, the jobseeker's allowance, by increasing means testing, will force people out of work and on to benefits. It will exacerbate the deep poverty traps in the benefit system, especially for the wives of men who become unemployed. Unemployed people cannot claim income support if their partners are working more than the hours threshold. That means that many families will be better off if, when the husband loses his job, the wife gives up hers and the whole family go on to benefits.

At one level, the Government have recognised the problem by increasing the hours threshold from 16 to 24, which is welcome, and by introducing the back-to-work bonus, which is unobjectionable. However, while taking that action, which is designed to get some people out of the poverty trap, they are at the same time putting more people into the poverty trap. Under the current system, those who work part time or for low pay and whose husbands become unemployed are able to work for 12 months without any fear that their continuing to work will make their families worse off. When that period is reduced to six months, many people will find that they, too, have to give up their job because, if they carrying on working, the whole family will be worse off.

Many families who might have escaped the poverty trap over a 12-month period because the unemployed husband was able to find work in that time will now hit the poverty trap at six months. Simply by reducing the length of time during which one can claim non-means-tested benefit, the Government are ensuring that the number of people forced to give up employment and go on to benefit will increase. Therefore, instead of helping the unemployed to move from welfare to work, the jobseeker's allowance will shift people from work to welfare. In defence of his proposal, the Employment Secretary does not argue that that is not the case but simply mutters, "Will you reverse it?" Our answer is my explanation why we shall vote against the Bill tonight.

The second justification is that the measure will supposedly target benefit on those who most need help. Although it is clear to everyone—the Government have admitted it—that 250,000 unemployed people will lose out under the Bill, it is not clear to anyone who precisely will be the beneficiaries of the supposed targeting. Where are they?

The third justification is that benefits need to be cut because too much is spent on the welfare state. Perhaps I could explain to the former Chief Secretary that the reason why public spending has increased, and indeed why it increased while he was Chief Secretary, and that taxes have gone up, also while he was at the Treasury, is not that the lives of the unemployed are being made more comfortable but that there are so many more of them. Two and a half million people have been forced into dependency on benefits. It is the Government's failure on unemployment and on law and order which has driven up public spending. Instead of dealing with such problems, they are, as usual, making the unemployed pay for their—the Government's—failures.

The jobseeker's allowance is another example of broken Tory promises. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, during the election the Tories promised not to increase national insurance contributions, but within a year they had done exactly that. They are now cutting the amount of money that people get in return for their national insurance contributions. No one voted for this cut—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) has not read or not understood the Bill if he believes that it is not about cuts. The Employment Secretary himself justifies the Bill on the basis that it will cut public spending.

No one voted for this cut in benefits, just as no one voted for the increase in national insurance contributions. This cut was not in the Tory manifesto, nor were the other tax increases and cuts in provision. It is no wonder that John Maples found that people no longer placed any trust in the Government. People pay more, but they get less. The central elements of the jobseeker's allowance are the hallmark of the Conservative approach to unemployment over the past 15 years—socially unjust, economically flawed and politically duplicitous.

Although the major portion of the Bill reflects the same old dogma of the past 15 years, other measures in it mark a belated admission by the Government that their employment policy has not worked. It was when dealing with those aspects of the Bill that the Secretary of State for Employment sounded most uncomfortable. In particular, the Government have at last recognised that long-term unemployment is not a problem that will be solved by the market; it needs particular action by, and particular attention from, Government. The Government have at last responded to Labour's suggestion that they should offer special incentives for employers to take on the long-term unemployed.

The problem is that, although the Government have accepted the principle, their measures are wholly inadequate. The national insurance holiday for employers who take on those who have been unemployed for two years or more will offer employers just £6 a week. Employers have already made it clear that that is simply not enough and that it does not offer an incentive.

What is more, the national insurance holiday will not be introduced until April 1996. Why should the two-year unemployed have to wait to become unemployed for three and a half years before they get this measly incentive? The message is clear. People will have to wait until April 1996 for the meagre and inadequate incentives to employers to take on the long-term unemployed. When it comes to helping the long-term unemployed, the Secretary of State does so with reluctance and delay. Cuts can be brought in straight away, but incentives, even small ones, take that much longer. The truth is that, whatever the window dressing in the Bill, it is about cutting benefits and making people more insecure about the prospect of unemployment.

Although the Tories think that grinding people down with fear and poverty makes them work harder, we take a different view. We believe that Britain can succeed only with an employment policy that attacks unemployment rather than the unemployed, and that aims to make our work force, on whom our economic prosperity relies, confident and secure, and not fearful and insecure.

There are immediate measures that the Government could and should have included in the Bill to ensure that people get back to work immediately and to modernise our infrastructure. Why do the Government still refuse to begin the phased release of the £5 billion of capital receipts? Why do they not take action to ensure that public-private projects are turned from announcements into action?

There is also a package of measures that the Government could and should have put into the Bill to deal with the particular problem of long-term unemployment. The long-term unemployed are, of course, not a single homogeneous group. There are young people, for example, who have never worked and who need the opportunity to get further qualifications. There are people who have worked all their lives, but have been made redundant in declining industries and need retraining. We propose a £75 a week tax rebate for employers who take on the two-year unemployed. That proposal, backed up by the minimum wage, would ensure that everyone who reached two years of unemployment was given the chance of work.

I now come to the minimum wage. It is intriguing that the Secretary of State for Employment has remained curiously silent about the minimum wage, although he is, supposedly, the cutting-edge, leading ideologue of the Tory party against the minimum wage. He did not say anything about it in employment questions and he did not even mention it in his speech. Could it be that he dare not mention the minimum wage because of his embarrassment at the fact that the Government, having carried out consultation about minimum wages in farming, decided to keep the agricultural wages board because there was general agreement, which the Cabinet was forced to accept, that it was fair, that it did not cost jobs and that employers and employees wanted it?

Mr. Portillo *rose—*

Ms Harman: Perhaps the Secretary of State will answer the question when he intervenes. Does he agree with keeping the minimum wage for agriculture? Let us hear the answer to that question.

Mr. Portillo: I am part of the Government decision to maintain the agricultural wages board. I have, however, a question for the hon. Lady. At what level will Labour set the minimum wage?

Ms Harman: We are not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I am about to answer the question, despite the fact that the answer given by the Secretary of State clearly shows all of us that he does not support the decision to keep the agricultural wages board. Despite the fact that he is Secretary of State for Employment, the Government have overruled him. They have been forced to accept our arguments on the minimum wage. I am confident that we shall now hear a great deal less about the minimum wage from the Secretary of State.

We will not set the level of the minimum wage two and a half years before the next election. What we will do is to make it clear that we will introduce a minimum wage, as the rest of Europe and America have, because it is fair, because it protects good employers and because, of course, it does not cost jobs.

Savings in benefits from our programme of a £75 incentive to employers would mean that, although in the first year it would cost £100 million, it would actually save money in the second year. Given that the Government have accepted the principle of tax rebates to get the long-term unemployed back to work, it seems that the most plausible reason for their failure to do anything worth while for the long-term unemployed is the opposition of the Secretary of State for Employment, whose support for the national insurance contributions holiday is lukewarm, to put it mildly.

Unemployment is not only a terrible experience for those who are out of work; it hangs like a cloud over those who are in work, creating a sense of insecurity among people at work. Increasingly, that is recognised by everyone except the Government. Insecurity is not just bad for those who experience it; it is bad for our economy. Is the Secretary of State shaking his head? We know that he is concerned to see the issue raised in opinion poll after opinion poll. We know that he is concerned that everyone, from the Trades Union Congress to the Confederation of British Industry, mentions that insecurity at work is a real problem. Of course, he does not want to do anything about it because he does not believe that the Government have any role in the labour market. All the evidence shows that an insecure work force are not as productive as a confident, secure and well-motivated work force. Our

[Ms Harman]

more successful companies know that and our international competitors, whose economies are doing better than ours, know that, too.

Security is also about people having the skills required in today's world of work. That means that people in work and people out of work need proper training. The Secretary of State talked in employment questions about training in work. British businesses do not invest as much in training as our international competitors. In France, three quarters of all employers invest more than 2 per cent. of their payroll costs in training. In the United Kingdom, only one third of employers do so. That is why other countries have a more competitive work force and a more productive economy. That is why we believe that, as part of tackling unemployment, the Government must take action to ensure that all businesses make a fair contribution towards training all the people in their work force.

It is scandalous that, when skill shortages are increasing and unskilled unemployment is rising, the Government are cutting the training budget. The Secretary of State claims to believe in high skills, yet he is cutting the training budget by 12 per cent. over the next three years. Indeed, according to the Government's own figures, they are now spending barely half as much on training for each unemployed person as Labour was in 1979. Contrary to Tory philosophy, we believe that the Government have an important role to play in helping the unemployed back to work, and the Bill does not do that; in ensuring that people have the skills they need, and the Government are not doing that; and in promoting the security and confidence of people at work. That is certainly not happening.

Last Friday, from the pulpit of Liverpool cathedral, the Secretary of State for Employment—

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Oh, God.

Ms Harman: I shall not comment on that. Last Friday, from the pulpit of Liverpool cathedral, the Secretary of State gave the nation a sermon and, with messianic fervour, he made some promises. He promised fairness, he promised tolerance, he promised liberty and he promised to restore the British people's dignity and self-respect. He promised not only economic prosperity but spiritual prosperity. He talked of his vision of a sense of national well-being in a contented nation. Then, he stepped out of the pulpit, into the Department of Employment, and he has brought to the House a Bill that will make the unemployed worse off. No wonder the British people feel that they cannot trust this Government and that they cannot believe anything that the Government say. The gap between the rhetoric and the reality is nowhere more stark than in the Bill and we will vote against it.

6.9 pm

Sir Ralph Howell (Norfolk, North): I welcome those parts of the Jobseekers Bill which will help to simplify the benefits system. That desperately needs doing and I am sure that the Bill will be successful in that direction. I hope very much that the Bill will make it easier for people to move from unemployment into work. That is also a very worthy part of the Bill. While most people recognise that most of the unemployed desperately want to work, a large section of people are claiming benefit and working in the black economy. The Bill will be successful, to a limited degree, in helping to solve that problem.

However, I am very disappointed that a great opportunity totally to reform the welfare state has been wasted. We have made a thorough mess of the welfare state—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—all of us, including the Opposition. The Opposition are more responsible for that than anybody else. We have failed to put the Beveridge report into operation. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was wrong when he said in his intervention that Beveridge said that benefits should go on indefinitely. He did not. Beveridge said that after three months or six months unemployment benefit would cease and work would be offered. That is exactly what should happen.

I am also very disappointed to hear the Secretary of State say that he is opposed to the state being an employer of last resort. The state is the provider of last resort. As the provider of last resort, we are spending well over £20 billion, perhaps as much as £30 billion, on supporting the unemployed on the condition that they do nothing whatever to help society generally. It is time that we thought this thing through. We should go back hundreds of years to 1601, when it was the duty of the local authorities to find work for everyone in their locality. In 1911, Keir Hardie introduced a Bill—the last sensible Bill to have been introduced by the Labour party—to offer and establish the right to work. Heaven help those who did not take the opportunity to work given in Keir Hardie's Bill.

What sense can there be in spending £20 billion or £30 billion while getting nothing whatever in return, while seeing the country become scruffier and scruffier because we cannot afford to paint schools and so on and while being less and less able to afford carers when their services could be used to keep elderly people in their own homes much longer than is otherwise possible? We should re-think the whole matter. The Bill damns itself in as much as we will save only £200 or £300 million here or there, which is negligible and within the margin of error. That means that we will do very little, even in solving the problem of fraud. All in all, we should raise our sights considerably.

I shall refer to the workstart programmes and the North Norfolk action pilot scheme, which the Department of Employment has declared to be highly successful. We have been piloting workstart for—I believe—18 months. Why on earth do not we make it universal? Every person who took part in workstart saved the taxpayer £30 a week. I simply cannot understand what is causing the blockage. The North Norfolk action pilot scheme was expected to cost the taxpayer another £750,000 to put 100 people to work for 18 months—costing the Government £5,000 a year more for each participant. But, in fact, the scheme proved to be successful because of the number of people who were called in for interview and who then disappeared from the unemployment register because it became a little too hot for them when they were offered work.

We will never solve the problem of fraudulent claims until we have a proper work test and we shall have a proper work test only when work is offered. Then, we could save millions of pounds and have a much tidier and better country than we have at the present time.

Part of our problem is that we have such a weak Opposition. Why are the Opposition so silent on subjects such as how much we spend on unemployment? When he was Chief Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told me that the cost of unemployment was £13.2 billion. That was in 1992-93. For the year 1993-94, according to the Department, that figure has risen to £14.3 billion—an increase of 8 per cent.—while unemployment was either falling or static and while inflation was just over 2 per cent. So, we have an ever-rising bill.

However, that is not the true cost of unemployment. The predecessor of the former Secretary of State declared that the cost of each unemployed person in the country was £9,000 a year, which, taken altogether, is somewhere in the region of £25 billion to £30 billion. The time has come for an independent inquiry to find out exactly how much unemployment costs and whether we could do something better than spend all that money, which is a total waste and gets us nowhere.

I have no time for those people who are claiming unemployment benefit who should not be claiming it; those people who work in the black economy. The black economy, as we all know, is huge. But, there is something off about insisting that people go on writing letters and re-writing their curriculum vitae month after month and so on when we all know that we are providing no work for them and that there will be no further work as a result of insisting on those practices. That seems like forcing people to play bagatelle on a board which does not have any holes and it is rather a cruel exercise. I urge the Secretary of State to do what he can to adjust the Bill as soon as possible and to bring in measures which will offer work. The time has come when we should seriously consider introducing a Bill on the right to work.

6.18 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): It is always a privilege to participate in a debate with the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell). He can be relied upon to produce a pungent, independent and articulate approach. What astonishes me so often, knowing his approach, his background and his party, is how often I agree with what he says and how often his colleagues disagree with him.

I want to begin with the right to work. I have always believed that people are entitled to work. In a decent country, a person is entitled to a home, a good place to live, food, clothing, education and health.

Mr. Streeter: Entitled?

Mr. Janner: Yes, entitled.

Mr. Streeter: By whom?

Mr. Janner: By a decent, civilised society and that is why I am in politics. We should try to provide in society the right for people to work. The hon. Member for Norfolk, North is correct. He was also correct to use the word "cruelty" in respect of the effect of unemployment on people's lives.

It is cruel to say to people, "We will give you training for work" when there is no work for them to do when that training is finished. It is cruel to say, "You have paid your taxes and national insurance; you have contributed so that you may get unemployment benefit" when the length of time when people will receive that benefit is to be cut in half.

Mr. Sykes: The hon. and learned Gentleman obviously feels very passionately about his subject. I appreciate and applaud that. However, if he believes that all those things are cruel, why does he want to vote for the social chapter which will destroy jobs throughout the country?

Mr. Janner: Because it will not destroy jobs; because it has not destroyed jobs in Europe; because disabled people have a right to decent treatment; because people have a right to minimum holidays and because this is the only uncivilised part of the European Community which refuses to recognise those basic decent rights for which we stand in this place. That is why.

I am looking forward to a Labour Government so that we may join Europe in the social chapter and ensure that the rights of our people—of the disabled, women and people who do not have a right to minimum holidays—

Mr. Sykes: Wake up.

Mr. Janner: If I were to wake up and find that, I would do so with joy because we should be serving our people in this country. We do not have much time to do that.

The Secretary of State said that there is no God-given right to be idle and to live off others. Indeed. No Opposition Member would wish anyone to be voluntarily idle, to be lazy or scroungers and not to work and to live off others. However, from my very long experience, I know that the vast majority of unemployed people are desperate for work. The vast majority of the unemployed are anxious to work. They may have got themselves off the register because they are sick of looking. They may have left the register because of the way in which it is organised, but, in my view and in that of the hon. Member for Norfolk, North, they have a right to work.

Our job, whether it is on the Employment Select Committee where we work together, whether it is in this House or in our constituencies, should be to find more work for people. I examined the Bill to discover whether it would create jobs. If any part of it would create jobs, I would support it, but I discovered that it does not do that.

The Bill will not produce more jobs. To have a Jobseekers Bill without producing more jobs is a contradiction in terms. It is like the old story of military intelligence. If one wants a jobseeker's allowance, one must provide jobs so that the people who are seeking jobs can find them.

When the Bill was published, I read its name because Governments of all parties organise names so that Bills and Acts will smell right to the public. Unemployment benefit is a benefit that people have earned through their work. A jobseeker's allowance is what the Government will allow people to have. There is a difference in terminology as there is in the smell of it.

The hon. Member for Norfolk, North was right. It is very expensive in terms of human cruelty and suffering to keep people out of work. It is also very expensive in terms of money. A person in work has the opportunity to serve and the chance to earn a living, to pay taxes and national insurance and to contribute towards others who cannot work, perhaps because they are disabled. Many people cannot work through no fault of their own.

[Mr. Janner]

As the hon. Member for Norfolk, North said, we must see how we can help find more jobs. We must make work available.

As a lawyer, I examined the Bill to see how the Government define job seeking. It is very interesting because the Government do not do that. The Bill states that

"For the purposes of this Act, 'available for employment' and 'actively seeking employment' have such meaning as may be prescribed";

not such meaning as the Government now give them, but as they may prescribe in regulations,just as people will get such money as the Government may allow. Regulations are not primary legislation. The Bill will become an enabling statute. This horrendous rubbish continues:

"Regulations may prescribe circumstances"—

they do not have to, they may—

"in which, for the purposes of this Act—".

Now, for your pre-dinner enjoyment Mr. Deputy Speaker, please listen and see whether you can understand this:

"(a) a person who is not available for employment is to be treated as available for employment;

(b) a person who is available for employment is to be treated as not available for employment;

(c) a person who is not actively seeking employment is to be treated as actively seeking employment; or

(d) a person who is actively seeking employment is to be treated as not actively seeking employment."

In other words, the Government can do whatever they like. They can make regulations as they see fit which will no doubt be passed at midnight and even the Government rebels will join them. The Government can prescribe.

We do not know what the Government are going to do, but we do know that what they do will not be fair. They will not make it fair for young people. Why should the Government always make life worse for young people who do not have jobs? Why should the unfairness be loaded on people who leave school or universities who cannot get jobs? Why should the burden of the jobseeker's allowance be placed on 18 to 24-year-olds? Why should it be placed on unemployed people whose partners do not work? Why should this Government of all Governments place the burden on people with £8,000 or more in savings, which they may have as redundancy pay, so that they will, at best, have their income halved? Why place burdens on those people?

The Bill does not add jobs or give incentives to jobs. It does not create work. It does not even create incentives to work. It reduces the amount of money that the state will pay in benefits, but it does not reduce that amount in the one way acceptable to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North and myself which is reducing it by having people at work so that they do not have to receive the benefit and so they are paying taxes and national insurance. That is the way to reduce the burden. It should not be reduced by making life harder for the unemployed.

I listened to the enchanting and typical intervention earlier by that somewhat eccentric and delightful hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). He was talking about scroungers. I have a feeling that that is the bedrock of Tory policy. They believe that everyone who does not have a job is a scrounger. They should go out and look at what is happening.

I want to cite a few examples from my constituency which I have served for so long. Male unemployment in my constituency today is 17.4 per cent. Yes, it has gone down and I am delighted about that, but still nearly one in five of males who want a job, even on the Government's method of assessing the figure, cannot get one.

On the great estates in my constituency, unemployment is much higher. Names that mean much in Leicester—for example, Beaumont-Leys, Braunstone, New Parks, Mowmacre, Stocking Farm—have 30 per cent. or 35 per cent. unemployment, I am told, because unemployment is in patches; it does not stretch. Saying that unemployment is 17.4 per cent. is like the doctor hurrying into the ward and asking the sister, "What is the average temperature of all the patients?"

The average unemployment among men is 17.4 per cent. and of women it is only 6.1 per cent. I wonder why. The answer, of course, is that they work part-time. If they are not employed, they go off the register; they are not unemployed. Even then, the level is higher than the national average. The national average of male unemployment is 11.1 per cent. One in 10 men are looking for jobs. They are not paying taxes or national insurance, and they are entitled to benefits. Female unemployment in Leicester, West is 6.1 per cent. and the national average is 4.8 per cent. There are women on the register who want work but cannot get it.

It is a rotten system and it will not be made fairer by the Bill. The Bill will not do much to help. It does one thing, perhaps: it shows some co-operation between two Departments, and that I welcome. I have always believed that Departments should work closely together and that if a decision by any Department creates unemployment, that Department should consult the Employment Secretary of the day. I am in favour of one-stop benefits—I hope that the system works. Those who are in schemes believe that it will not work, but I hope that it does, because that would reduce the burden. Otherwise, what a mess.

I conclude with a quotation from a book called "A Time To Serve" by Rev. Dr. John E. Brown who, happily, is the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). That book, which has just been produced, and which I strongly recommend because the writer is a distinguished cleric who has no doubt made speeches and sermons from Liverpool cathedral—I suggest that the Minister reads it—states:

"Lord you must have made a mistake in your calculations."—

I was wondering whether he had the Government in mind—

"There is a big mistake somewhere.
The hours are too short,
The days are too short,
Our lives are too short . . .
we must not lose time,
waste time,
kill time,
For time is a gift that you give us,
But a perishable gift,
A gift that does not keep."

Unemployed people find that time passes with immeasurable slowness. They have the same short time on this earth as we have. We should work to see that they have work. The Bill will not add to that possibility, and it should be rejected for that reason.

6.32 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): The year 1995 marks two special dates for me: one celebrates the founding of our family business 150 years ago and the other marks the 700th anniversary of Scarborough returning a Member of Parliament to Westminster, although not the same one. Of course, there has been a labour market in Scarborough and Whitby for much longer than that, and it has thrived without employment directives from Brussels. My experience of the labour market is limited to the practical day-to-day difficulties of running a company involved in manufacturing, retailing and agricultural property.

The Bill deals with the labour market. We in our business know the value of a flexible labour market, to which the Tory reforms of the past 15 years have made positive contributions—reforms that have benefited companies and employees alike. I talk with business colleagues who also value the Government's approach, some of whom have charge of their European subsidiaries in Europe. What began two years ago as a trickle of rumours across the English channel has now become a hard fact. Companies in Europe are now deliberately pursuing policies designed to minimise the employment of labour. All the passion exhibited by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) will not alter that single hard fact, for it is manufacturers and companies in Europe—not he or the Governments of Europe—who provide jobs.

The Economist tells us that, despite a sharp increase in overall confidence in Europe, businesses throughout Europe expect to cut their work forces in the years that lie ahead, with one singular and significant exception. That significant exception is the first choice for Japanese and American firms when establishing a presence in Europe. That significant exception has one of the lowest unemployment figures in Europe and one of the best strike records since the 1890s. It is, of course, the significant country of Great Britain.

What is the other significant difference between Great Britain and the others? It is the absence of the social chapter and the existence instead of a flexible labour market. The Jobseekers Bill will continue and amplify that difference. It is part of the process of reform that is enabling the country to compete.

The Bill also deals with the provision of welfare. Sadly, Britain's welfare state remains a gold-mine for those who wish to take unfair advantage of it. One of the most unpleasant manifestations of that is the emergence of so-called badly run Department of Social Security hostels in seaside resorts. Young unemployed people migrate from towns and cities and claim a variety of benefits in an altogether more congenial town. Some come in search of work; others have no intention of lifting a finger.

It has become clear from experience that the work-shy can easily meet current conditions for receiving benefit by adhering to the letter of the law while taking parallel action designed to ensure that they never get a job. The sight of such able-bodied youths lounging on street corners, always with sufficient money for booze and fags, and, in some cases, drugs, is a slap in the face for the decent, hard-working majority.

In my factory, where take-home pay is up to about £300 a week, we have no trouble finding good, well-motivated workers, but it is frustrating to find new recruits who are playing the present system for all it is worth. One 22-year-old lasted three days with us, and he left saying that benefits of £160 a week were worth more to him. Presumably, he preferred to stay home watching videos. *[Interruption.]* Two others arrived on a Monday. *[Interruption.]* I regret to tell Opposition Members that I can speak from my experience of employing people. I expect that Opposition Members' experience of employing people extends no further than the research assistants who dominate the Palace of Westminster. I am talking about practical experience.

Two other people arrived on a Monday. *[Interruption.]* They took an hour off on Tuesday—we thought to sign off the dole. They did not come back until Wednesday, and then did so only to tell us that they found factory work tiring and to ask whether we would please sack them to make it easier for them to claim their dole. We refused to oblige, of course.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sykes: I will give way in a moment, if the hon. Gentleman can bear to control himself.

We refused to oblige, of course, but the men left and, as far as we know, had no trouble slipping back on to the dole.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman referred to his former employee aged 22, who left saying that he could gain more money if he was claiming benefit. What wage was the hon. Gentleman paying that young man?

Mr. Sykes: The hon. Member was not listening to what I was saying. It is always a pleasure to encounter the soft red underbelly of the socialist party from time to time. I was saying that the gentleman concerned received sufficient benefit to make it not worth his while to work. He preferred to stay at home watching videos. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that, with the best will in the world, the hon. Gentleman must accept that there are such people. I am relating my direct experience to the House.

The Bill will make such young men start from their armchairs, if they are tuned into the parliamentary channel this evening, because they will be required to be available for any work that they can reasonably be expected to do. Others will be required to improve their employability. That is another aspect to which the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) must turn his mind if he has not already done so.

Those young men will have to take steps, if appropriate, to present themselves acceptably to employers. Perhaps that will herald, at last, the last of the Mohicans. If they cannot be persuaded voluntarily to remove the rings from their noses the Bill will lead them—by their noses, as it were—into workfare projects, under which they will be obliged to put something back into the community.

The idea of workfare has widespread support in the country, and in many ways the Bill's mention of workfare is one of its most exciting aspects. I urge the Government to ensure that whatever scheme is chosen they make simplicity their byword, because an expensive and bureaucratic system will strangle workfare at birth.

For scroungers and for the feckless, the indolent and the work-shy—*[Interruption]*—there is no good news in the Bill. They may even, rightly, face disqualification

[Mr. Sykes]

from benefit. However, if Britain's welfare system has been a gold-mine for those who wish to take unfair advantage of it—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Mr. Sykes:—it is and will remain a blessed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should pay a little more attention to the occupant of the Chair.

I recognise that hon. Members have not had the chance to use their voices much during the recess, but I should be grateful if they would reserve their comments until they have the Floor.

Mr. Sykes: I assure Opposition Members that I shall listen to them in silence.

If Britain's welfare state has been a gold-mine for those who wish to take unfair advantage of it, it is and will remain a blessed relief to those who genuinely need it. Elements in the Bill will be especially welcome to such people.

Near my home in Scarborough lives a hard-working family, all of whom are in work except the head of the household, who is 50 years old and desperate for a job. The tragedy is that he is almost always told, "Sorry, we are looking for someone younger." In my business experience I find older people reliable, skilled and experienced—I can even extend that description to the hon. Member for Workington.

My neighbour and many like him, who constitute the long-term unemployed, will be helped back to work by provisions and incentives such as a national insurance holiday for companies that give a job to someone who has been on the unemployed list for more than two years.

In Scarborough and Whitby we have our own powerhouse of a micro-economy. A wide range of dynamic companies have established themselves on the coast, providing jobs and prosperity. That is what counts. However, when most of my parliamentary colleagues think of Scarborough and Whitby they think of it as a nice place to go on holiday or to retire to. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Workington is welcome any time.

Many part-time jobs have been created in tourism and nursing, which suits many of the families living in Scarborough and Whitby, who value the flexibility afforded by part-time work. There is especially good news in the parts of the Bill that help people who wish to engage in part-time work. A claimant's partner will be able to work for up to 24 hours per week without the claimant being disqualified from benefit. The measures that encourage people to leave benefit by taking part-time work as a prelude to full-time work will also prove helpful, as will many other measures in the Bill.

It is almost three years since I became a Member of Parliament—

Mr. Janner: Too long.

Mr. Sykes: It may be too long for the hon. and learned Gentleman, but I expect to be here for an awful lot longer than he will be.

It is almost three years since I became a Member of Parliament, and in that time the Government have taken many important steps forward—the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993, the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, and now the Jobseekers Bill. All are entirely consistent with the Government's overall strategy of sustaining and building on our achievements during the 1980s.

British business is now well equipped, with startling advantages in its ability to compete with the world. Opposition Members must not forget that it is the rest of the world with which we are competing. That is nothing to do with post-neoclassical endogenous growth theory or symbiotic relationships of one kind or another; it is straightforward common sense.

The closing years of the 20th century will magnify continental Europe's failure to create the right conditions for jobs. Its minimum wages, massive welfare systems, extreme employment protection laws, parental leave directives, works councils, directives on part-time work, working hours restrictions and social chapter are all profoundly misguided. Curse Europe's efforts to impose such conditions on the English.

I finish by reminding the House about my friends who run subsidiary companies in other European countries. One told me before Christmas that he could not afford to take on anyone else in Europe because of the cost of employing people. But I have saved the best example until last. A large company in my constituency has decided not to build a new factory in France, because of the cost of employing people there, and instead has doubled its production in Scarborough. Those are the hard facts, and in the end it is the hard facts that count. That is why hon. Members should vote for the Bill.

6.44 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): I welcome one or two features of the Bill, and I shall come to those later. I had been hoping for some positive measures, as had unemployed people throughout the country and many other hon. Members, but unfortunately the Bill is a sad disappointment to us all.

I had thought that the Secretary of State for Social Security had had a change of heart, especially when I read the speech that he delivered in Northern Ireland a few weeks ago, in which he seemed to take into account the problems of the low-paid and the unemployed, but after his speech yesterday I realised that that was a fallacy and that there had been no change of heart. I did not even expect a change of heart from the Secretary of State for Employment.

There is no denying that new legislation is needed, but the Bill represents a missed opportunity. The benefits system is too complex and it has too many poverty traps. The Secretary of State for Social Security admitted in the White Paper that the overwhelming majority of people make every effort to find work at the earliest opportunity, so why are these draconian measures needed? The Bill's aim was supposed to be to get people back to work; instead, it will do nothing but save the Treasury money.

Let us look at some of the specifics—for instance, the measures affecting 18 to 25-year-olds, who now get less income support than anyone else. I have never thought that that was fair, but instead of taking the opportunity to change it the Government have extended the disadvantage. When the jobseeker's allowance is introduced people under 25 who have paid national insurance contributions will still get less—£9.55 less, to

be precise—than everyone else. How are young people supposed to manage on less than anyone else? Do food, clothes and rent cost them less? Of course not; the proposal is totally unfair.

Cutting entitlement to the contributory benefit that is now called unemployment benefit from 12 months to six months will make thousands of people with savings ineligible for benefit. Liberal Democrats say that we will reverse that, and I should like to hear a similar guarantee from the Labour party. People who oppose the Government cutting the time from 12 months to six months should say what they would do if they ever took office.

I asked the Secretary of State for Employment how much it would cost to implement the jobseeker's agreement, and I received a written answer saying that the subject was still under consideration. I now ask the right hon. Gentleman, or whichever of his colleagues is to reply, to give me an answer to that question. We need to know. I know that the jobseeker's agreement is an extension of restart, but so much more weight will be put on the interviews. How much will it cost to train the interviewers? At present many people who go for restart interviews are humiliated and demoralised, and we do not want that to happen with the jobseeker's agreement. The Secretary of State said that the subject was still under consideration, but we need to know those figures now.

If the Secretary of State for Social Security thinks that people are really trying to find work, and the Secretary of State for Employment agrees with him, why is the Bill necessary? Why not concentrate on the long-term unemployed, and on providing proper training packages for people?

Will the training necessary for the jobseeker's agreement to work be available? For example, if an unemployed person gives the Government the guarantee that he or she will seek work, and the interviewer says that the person needs training to find a job, will the Government commit themselves to providing the training for which a need has been identified? I doubt it very much, because the training budget has been reduced from £1 billion to £782 million in the past five years. I should like some reassurance from the Secretary of State that training will be available if an unemployed person is identified as needing it.

At present, a person is allowed to study for 21 hours a week before losing benefit. The Bill provided a great opportunity for the Government to change that, and to make sure that people could study for longer, but the limit will remain at 21 hours. The Government talk about education and training. If they really believed in a properly educated and trained work force, they would ensure that people could study for longer than 21 hours.

Let us look at the problems that disabled people will face. With the new medical test for incapacity benefit, a lot of people will lose that benefit.

Mr. Barry Porter: I was much impressed by the hon. Lady's argument about extending the hours of study before a person loses benefit, but how much longer than 21 hours should the limit be? She cannot just leave it there.

Ms Lynne: It is obvious that someone who is studying will have better job opportunities after he has qualifications, so it is short-sighted to restrict the study time to 21 hours. I will not say what the limit should be for everybody, but a person who is studying should be available for work at the same time. If a job opportunity comes up and he takes that job, he will of course cease his studies. The 21-hour limit is not feasible.

If disabled people lose entitlement to incapacity benefit, they may try to get the jobseeker's allowance. A jobseeker's agreement will then be drawn up, but what will happen if that disabled person cannot meet its conditions? Will he then be denied the jobseeker's allowance? I should like an assurance that disabled people will not fall through the gap between two benefits.

There are some good points in the Bill. The back-to-work bonus is welcome as far as it goes—it does not go far enough—as it gives people an incentive to return to work. I also welcome the jobseeker's grant and the year's national insurance holiday for an employer who takes on someone who has been unemployed for two years.

I also welcome workstart, which the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) mentioned. I do not see why the Government cannot extend the pilot schemes across the country. Indeed, they could go further and introduce a proper benefits transfer scheme under which benefits could be given to employers who take on someone who has been unemployed for more than two years. That would get people back into work, and I am sure that that is what all hon. Members want.

We need comprehensive reform, not the piecemeal approach of the Bill. Instead of merging unemployment benefit and income support, the Government should merge family credit and income support. That would get people out of the poverty trap and create a new low-income benefit so that people would not lose benefit pound-for-pound when they get back into work. There would be a real incentive, and it would end the situation where the partner of a person who loses his job is sometimes better off going on the dole.

The Bill is punitive. It proposes some good measures, but the vast majority of it is punitive. It will not achieve the real objective, which is supposed to be to get people back to work. I am desperately afraid that some of the people who cannot meet their commitments under the jobseeker's agreement for whatever reason may be forced into starvation—I know that that sounds dramatic—and some could be forced into crime.

6.53 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, in his address in Liverpool cathedral last week, said how struck he had been—particularly since he went to the Department of Employment—by the need for public debate on ethical issues. I welcome that invitation. My right hon. Friend is a person of high seriousness, and he is regarded by many people as the standard-bearer for the Conservativism of the future. I hold him personally in the warmest regard, but I differ profoundly from him as to the course that the Conservative party should take. The Bill crystallises our differences.

Why have my right hon. Friends—I am not sure how many have been closely involved—introduced the Bill? They have not done it to achieve substantial savings in public expenditure. I do not doubt that the preliminaries to the Bill go back to 1993, when my right hon. Friend

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

was Chief Secretary. There was at that time a fiscal crisis, and no doubt my right hon. Friend took the view that a fundamental review of unemployment benefit and income support might yield substantial savings.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security rightly insists that we attend to a problem that we must address on both sides of the Chamber. That is that the growth of social security expenditure is at least as fast as the growth of the economy. I would put it to my right hon. Friends that the policies to create more jobs that they are pursuing are very much the best way to tackle the problem.

Meantime, we have found that any savings that the fundamental review may yield from benefits will not be large. The Bill states that savings on benefit costs of £410 million in 1996-1998 will be offset by an increase in administrative expenditure of £280 million in three years.

Much as I welcome the closer integration of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service in their practical operations, I do not think that that is the reason why the legislation has been brought in. I doubt whether primary legislation is needed to achieve much that can usefully be done, and the purpose of the Bill goes way beyond making the services more user-friendly.

My right hon. Friend rightly insists that a condition for the receipt of benefit should be that claimants must be available for work and be actively seeking work. That has not been in dispute, as he suggested, since the time of Beveridge.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It might be as well—as Beveridge is so misquoted in the House—to recall that, when the actively seeking work principle was dropped in the 1930s, he said:

"May it never rise again from its dishonoured grave".

Mr. Howarth: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but—as my right hon. Friend explained earlier—Beveridge certainly expected the exercise of active personal responsibility on the part of unemployed people.

The White Paper acknowledges that the overwhelming majority of people who become unemployed make every effort to find work at the earliest opportunity. That is the positive recognition which ought to animate policy. If we take care of the jobs, jobseekers will in the main take care of themselves.

The White Paper claims that the policy is designed to improve incentives, but I find that the Government's policy is contradictory in that regard. I welcome the concessions on earnings and hours of work on the part of partners before loss of benefit, the relaxation of the rules for trying a new job experimentally, the bonus to encourage people to progress through part-time work to full-time work, the improved transition to in-work benefits and the jobfinder's grant. Those measures complement other sensible initiatives on child care and nursery education. I also welcome the alteration of the rules governing employers' national insurance contributions for those who employ low-paid workers and people who have been unemployed for two years.

The Bill, however, moves in the opposite direction in an important sense. It serves to intensify the disincentive for work and saving by switching people on to means-tested benefits and into the poverty trap six months earlier than in the existing system. That seems perverse.

The true explanation of why the Government are introducing the legislation is to be found in paragraph 2.7 of the White Paper. It says:

"Changes are needed to make clear to unemployed people the link between their receipt of benefit and the obligations that places upon them."

The purpose of the Bill is to establish an emphasis. It is to assert a set of values and a view of human nature, society and the role of the state.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was candid in a carefully considered speech to the Conservative political centre in October 1993 when he sought to rehabilitate stigma from its decline at the hands of political correctness and argued that we needed in our public philosophy a renewed emphasis on right and wrong and on personal responsibility. In an address to Church at Work a month earlier, he said:

"too broad a benefit system can undermine the morale of those who receive help . . . By its choices, a government demonstrates its philosophy and shows its moral fibre."

The argument about the effect of poor relief on the morale of recipients goes back at least as far as the debates on the 1834 Poor Law. On that occasion it was not the Tories but the Benthamites who argued that dependence on poor relief should be a "less eligible" and desirable condition and who required that paupers should be distinguished from the rest of society. It was Disraeli, the young future leader of the Tory party, who said of the new 1834 Poor Law that it was

"both a moral crime and a political blunder."

Decisions on welfare are—or ought to be—among the most difficult that Governments have to take. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State observes from time to time, they involve issues of moral hazard. I put it to him that they do so not only for the poor but for the powerful and affluent. If Ministers are sometimes uncertain what to do—in all humility, how can they not be?—they should take a risk in the direction of generosity. It may be argued that that way lies fiscal perdition, but I would say that to be generous in this respect is a proper use of our money, which Ministers raise in taxes and hold in trust on behalf of us all. It is perfectly proper and also prudent to do so. We need to consider carefully whether targeting, taken over the life cycle, will save public expenditure.

The circumstances in which my right hon. Friends make those decisions are of giddying economic and cultural change. Employers are stripping out surplus labour and skills and keeping only the core. They call in outworkers as and when they need them. The cost of supporting spare capacity increasingly falls on households instead of shareholders. Those changes are, no doubt, exhilarating for the strong and ambitious. They are frightening for the less capable and the less fortunate.

Of course, my right hon. Friends are right to embrace change. There is no prosperous future for us in refusing to face the future. So the Government drive forward. Sometimes, even to their most affectionate supporters, they are reminiscent of Bakunin's chariot of revolution, rolling and gnashing its teeth as it rolls. My right hon. Friends vigorously dismantle the old and throw out historical lumber. Deregulation, flexibility, free trade,

contracting out, opting out and targeting are our nostrums. Radicalism is our watchword. In their eagerness for change, I trust that my right hon. Friends will not forget that it is the responsibility of Government to ensure that the victims of change are not destitute.

In Liverpool, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took to task some churchmen who had been, he suggested, seduced from individualism into collectivism. I observe to my right hon. Friend that the Church has always usefully reminded us that we are members one of another.

The dismantling of an old order is not the creation of a new one. As the old dies, the new struggles to be born. As Gramsci noted, in the interval morbid symptoms appear. They include systemically higher unemployment, and casualisation and insecurity extended across society. People are rendered derelict because their obsolete skills, or their lack of skills, mean that they cannot find employment. Inequality widens and the poorest households become poorer.

We are elected to Parliament and we serve in government with a responsibility to take care of our society. I do not believe that market forces are an invisible hand that of itself will create a worthwhile pattern out of all this. Adam Smith was a moral philosopher as well as an economist and he insisted on the need for what he called sympathy.

The Bill widens inequality and deepens impoverishment. It would reduce benefits paid to people unemployed over a year by between 20 and 70 per cent. The changes that it seeks to introduce in the benefits system would be prejudicial to families. That seems an aberration for the Conservative party. The changes would be particularly prejudicial to young families. Under the present system of income support, if both partners are below the age of 25, they receive a lower rate of benefit. Under the new arrangements, that will also apply to recipients of contributory benefit. I have never understood the rationale behind the lower rate of income support for 24-year-olds. If people are 24, their household costs are not thereby less than if they are 25. We need to think carefully about the effect of the changes on children. Poverty is most concentrated in families with children.

I have to say with sadness that I find the Government's policy too harsh. I also find it improvident. The traumas of poverty carry dire long-term consequences both for society and for the Exchequer. Those who are stigmatised and alienated from our society into the workhouse, so to speak—one might say that workwise is our modern workhouse—feel less sense of obligation to society. It is as well that we should consider at least the correlation between lawlessness and unemployment.

Mr. Barry Porter: I have followed my hon. Friend's philosophical discourse with some interest. It has been intellectually stimulating. He seems to suggest that we should show more generosity. We all agree with that. Is not the dilemma that he has to face, and everyone regardless of party has to face, that by being generous and increasing the unit costs of labour, our industry would become less competitive than it otherwise would be and could not sell its products? That would cause more people to come out of work. That generosity would then increase and keep the circle going. There is the dilemma.

While any Tory of the old school—I hope that I can include both of us in that—would like to be as generous as possible, there is a practical difficulty. Unless someone can square that circle, there is no real or obvious answer.

Mr. Howarth: I was talking about the benefits system, not the minimum wage, although I would willingly discuss that with my hon. Friend. I suggest that if he has a moment, he should go to the Library and look at the research on that subject by Professor Card of Princeton university.

I wonder how people on income support can manage decently to feed their families and heat their homes. Under the proposals in the Bill, we would require some people on benefit to live in yet deeper penury. As matters stand already, if people, in the opinion of an Employment Service official, leave a job voluntarily or for reasons of misconduct, they are liable to a deduction from their income support of up to 40 per cent. That may last for up to 26 weeks.

For single people under 25, income support after a 40 per cent. deduction is £21.70 a week. I ask my hon. Friends to imagine what it must be like to try to live on £21.70 a week. In Liverpool, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, towards the end of his address, that among other things,

> "Britain stands for . . . the freedom of the citizen . . . to offer his labour and to withdraw it."

I wonder whether he overlooked that feature of the benefits system when he used those words.

As it is, we are increasing the use of sanctions. Between April and September 1994, 40,000 people suffered sanctions of up to 40 per cent. for refusing to attend or complete a compulsory programme. That was an increase of two and a half times over the previous year. Disqualifications on the ground that claimants are not actively seeking work have trebled since 1990-91.

As my right hon. Friend knows, I am concerned about older claimants. It is a remarkable fact that 59 per cent. of people now aged between 55 and 64 are not in employment. That compares with 8 per cent. in 1977 and it is stark evidence of the insecurity and, in all too many cases, the impoverishment caused by technological change and the impact of a global, competitive labour market.

Under our present rules, which will be perpetuated through this measure, people under the age of 60 will have to seek work actively if they are to receive benefit. As my right hon. Friend told me when I put this consideration to him on a previous occasion, we must not give up on them, but I fear that, for that age group, the requirement actively to seek work will be a humiliating ritual associated with benefit dependency, rather than a functional feature of the labour market. It is as if one of us were to go into the pulpit and tell those older people, "Seek, even though ye shall not find."

We are introducing a further severity. If a single person, who is in good health, declines to conform with a jobseeker's direction, and if he does not agree with or accept the say-so of an Employment Service official, as my right hon. Friend explained when he opened the debate, he or she will not receive benefit for a fortnight and will have no means of subsistence. Paragraph 4.40 of the White Paper makes it clear that such people would not

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even be eligible for a loan from the social fund. I was interested in that aspect in relation to what my right hon. Friend said in Liverpool:

"We must face the new moral and spiritual challenge of living in less adverse times".

I am not sure that that particular circumstance was what he had in mind.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) rightly drew attention to the possible predicament of about 200,000 people who are eligible for invalidity benefit, for whom there is no work, and whose disability may not be severe enough to qualify them for the new, more stringently assessed, incapacity benefit, but who may find themselves unable to satisfy the availability and actively seeking work requirements to qualify for the jobseeker's allowance.

On a previous occasion, my right hon. Friend observed that it is the responsibility of the state to provide a comprehensive safety net for the needy. I very much hope that the interests of that group will be carefully safeguarded.

I am dismayed by the authoritarianism of the Bill. I am perplexed that it should be so. In Liverpool, my right hon. Friend said:

"The first duty of government . . . is to create conditions in which people can become what they want to become".

This legislation is not consistent with that attractive spirit.

Last summer, about three times the number of people were required to go on compulsory courses than on vocational training after restart interviews. The Government's plans suggest that, in replacing job plan workshops with workwise and 1-2-1, they anticipate that about twice the number of 18 to 24-year-olds will go on compulsory courses. Perhaps that is our variant of workfare, which has its supporters among Opposition as well as Conservative Members. Enthusiasts for that system should realise that we need to be very self-aware as we explore those policies, to be sure that it is not a tendency to indulge the authoritarian personality that is tempting us forward, and that we are genuinely trying to find practical ways in which to help unemployed people.

The jobseeker's direction is the most authoritarian feature of the policy. It goes well beyond the existing official recommendation and provides that the state should be able to lay down detailed requirements of behaviour for our citizens. It provides vague, but extensive, discretionary powers for officials to require their fellow citizens to undertake activities that seem appropriate to them and to alter their personal ways and style. In Liverpool, my right hon. Friend said that

"over-zealous intervention by the state undermines

personal responsibility".

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Does not my hon. Friend agree that, as a society, structural, long-term unemployment is one of the problems that we face? Countries that try to tackle that problem all end up with some element of compulsion. For example, Sweden is the most liberal regime and it is no doubt one of which he might approve, but after a year it requires an unemployed person to take work. Most countries do so, but that is an element of what he is criticising. Surely an element of compulsion is necessary and has to be part of any scheme.

Mr. Howarth: I am not arguing against the condition about availability and actively seeking work. I have deep doubts about the wisdom of allowing the Employment Service to exercise dictatorial powers over unemployed people. I find that profoundly illiberal.

In Liverpool, my right hon. Friend observed how much better the democratic state is than the authoritarian variety—certainly, it at least allows us to question the policies.

I am confused by the Government's moral position. The centrepiece of the policy is the jobseeker's agreement—an undertaking whereby the unemployed person commits himself to be available, to seek work actively and to comply with requirements stipulated in return for benefit—the jobseeker's allowance.

The Conservative party has always attached importance to contract as a principle that marshals and orders the energies of free enterprise. It is in the nature of a true agreement, however, that it is made freely and not under duress, such as the loss of benefit.

The Government should also abide by their pre-existing contract. Unemployment benefit is an entitlement based on national insurance contributions, which lasts for 12 months. We are going to substitute for that the contributory jobseeker's allowance, which will be available for six months only. We are taking out the adult dependant's allowance. Similarly, we have been reducing contributory benefits for the long-term sick and disabled. Those cuts for the unemployed and for disabled people come in the wake of a 10 per cent. increase in employees' national insurance contributions.

My right hon. Friends insist that one should not have something for nothing, but nor should one have nothing for something. What is the Government's view of the contributory principle? Is it simply to be an illusion—a device for rationing benefit—or is it still to be a bargain between the Government, employers and our citizens for the provision of social insurance?

My right hon. Friends speak moralistically about the "job-shy", but if they rewrite the national insurance contract in their favour, they will undermine their moral claim on the unemployed.

None of us condones abuse of the benefits system. Nor should we condone abuse of the sanctions system. I commend my hon. Friends to read the latest annual report of the chief adjudication officer. He found that 39 per cent. of Employment Service adjudications in 1993-94 were unsatisfactory and that in no less than 92 per cent. of appeal decisions a claimant disputed the suspension of benefit. He therefore recommended that there should be an

"investigation of the reasons for the continuing poor standard."

That report should be read in conjunction with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux report issued in October, "Benefit of the Doubt", which describes how, in 1993-94, 180,000 people whose benefit was suspended erroneously had to subsist on reduced income support payments or even none. Many had to do so for months on end while waiting for their case to be heard.

Those failures in administration and justice are the real scandal. They dwarf the scandal of abuse by fraudulent claimants of benefit. I worry that present policy may make the position worse. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has just left the Chamber because, in response to the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), he said that the Employment Service had not been incentivised to disqualify more claimants. The Employment Service agreement seems to show that a target is set of 135,000 challenges to claimants on the basis that they are not making themselves available for or actively seeking work. I am struck by the confidence of my right hon. Friends, therefore, in systematically encouraging the service to challenge more benefits, given the background of miscarriages of justice described by the chief adjudication officer.

My right hon. Friends' confidence in the capacity of the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency for wise administration is great. Clause 28 of the Jobseekers Bill establishes new offences. It says that a person is guilty of an offence if he

"refuses or neglects to answer any question or to furnish any information . . . under this Act.

Regulations under this Act may provide for contravention of, or failure to comply with, any of their provisions to be an offence.

A person guilty of an offence under . . . any regulations made under this Act, shall be liable . . . to a fine".

Are the unemployed to be treated as criminals? They are our fellow human beings and should be able to count on our sympathy and support. What will it do to the morale of our society to proceed in this way? We must base our policy on a belief in human worth and good will. If we do not, we shall provoke a cynicism and demoralisation that will be truly ruinous.

What will it do to the public service ethos, to create arbitrary powers, systematically encourage officials to disqualify from benefit, sanction claimants even more severely than at present and criminalise them? Why should we do that? Is it to achieve candle-end economies for the Treasury—candle ends that might provide light and even some warmth in the households of the poor? Is it to appease the consciences of the affluent so that they can feel more comfortable, believing that those who are poor are feckless and fiddling the system? Are the poor so undeserving that they deserve this?

We need to deconstruct some of the Orwellian language in the Bill, such as "jobseeker's agreement" and "motivation courses". How can we compulsorily motivate someone? I am sure that those who work in the Employment Service are decent people—some will no doubt wish to minimise the harsher effects of the policy—but observation of history and human nature suggests to me that if people in their official capacity are given the power to control and punish their fellow citizens, in less than five minutes some of them start to abuse that power. It is fatuous to suppose that there is something so redeemingly British about our officials that it will not occur here.

The moral energy of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatism lay in her commitment to freedom and responsibility. The history of this Parliament is, perhaps most importantly, that of resistance to arbitrary power. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke to Church at Work, he was dismissive of

"high generosity with other people's money"

and

"collectivised charity".

He said:

"High taxes erode personal values."

But do low taxes enhance personal values? How much could the good Samaritan, my right hon. Friend's moral hero, achieve of himself and alone? The state is an agent and Ministers are trustees of a collective purpose on the part of us all to further certain things—a purpose that kindliness makes us share but mere individualism prevents us fulfilling. Do my right hon. Friends reject the view of Iain McLeod, in another address to the Conservative political centre, that it is the task of a Tory to heal and unify?

The labour market is changing fast. There are few fixities in our national life, but one is the British sense of fairness. My right hon. Friend, like Saint-Just, desires only to act with due rigour and promote virtue. We are not, thank goodness, a nation of puritans or of rednecks. There is no constituency in this country for a kind of country-cousin Gingrichism. Republican virtue is alien to the Tory tradition. In 1945, voters ignored heroic leadership and were mindful of what they took to be the indifference of Conservative politicians in the 1930s to poverty and social injustice. After 1945, the Conservative party learnt the lesson. That precedent contains a warning for the party to which my right hon. Friend and I both belong.

7.26 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): No one would object to the measure that we are debating today if the country were in a position of full employment. But we are not in a position of full employment, so the task that we set ourselves in this debate is to try to understand the extent to which the Bill helps us to move back to a position of full employability.

Not for the first time, two Conservative Back Benchers have helped us to understand the failures of a measure before us to live up to the objective of full employability. This is not the first time that I have heard that elucidation from the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) and my hon. Friend—if I may call him that—the Member for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell). They have both underlined important points which I merely wish to underscore.

Above all, I want to emphasise a point made by the hon. Member for Norfolk, North about what unemployment does to people. He did not present it in a fairytale way as though there were only one type of unemployed person, but stressed the image of unemployed people who are nearly broken by the experience of unemployment and who, in a market economy, feel a lack of worth because they cannot contribute fully to the society in which they live. As he said, the picture is more complicated than that. But whatever I go on to say, we must never lose that image from our debates. All of us, especially those with industrial constituencies, see many people in our surgeries who say that they are playing the system. Although their mouths smile, their watery, wintry eyes tell a different tale about what unemployment does to them. It is extremely important to keep that image before us.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon asked what moral lessons we could draw from the Bill. I thought it extraordinary that a Secretary of State who had just

[Mr. Frank Field]

journeyed to Liverpool to talk from one of the most prestigious pulpits in that city should have scored a first in this House by introducing a measure concerning the unemployed. He told us that, ever since measures were first introduced here, conditions were attached to benefits. That is true, but it is only one of the issues about which we should remind ourselves at this time.

There have been many measures against unemployment, whether from Lloyd George and Churchill in the last Liberal Government, Chamberlain in the inter-war period, the coalition Government or from the Governments who followed in the post-war years. But before tonight no Minister has spoken about such a measure without relating it to the moral framework within which the Secretary of State thinks individuals should operate and the moral framework within which society operates.

It is no longer good enough to think that people outside believe that mention of incentive and the market system means that one has conducted an appraisal of moral systems and how they affect individuals and build up to affect the quality and tone of the society in which we work.

For a long time, it has seemed that the Government are brain dead when it comes to looking at the moral and physical impacts of their measures on the wider society. I shall recall just three. Millions of our constituents were taught by the poll tax that it pays to break the law. They were given individual tuition in the Thatcher seminars that one could get away with breaking the law and there were no penalties. Millions learnt that lesson, and they store it in their hearts and act on it. Before then, they were proud never to be lawbreakers. The Government pushed them into that position.

Just before the Christmas recess, an answer was sneaked out about the Child Support Agency. A third of a million people in the country were told, "Well done, lads, for breaking the law and for putting your two fingers up to the Government. Well done for saying that you will not abide by what we enact as the law of this country. We are calling the troops off. The dogs are off you. Don't worry, we will not seriously pursue you for maintenance."

What sort of lesson is that for the single mums who have been deserted, or for all the fathers who protest because they think that the agency has acted arbitrarily or is asking for too much money from them? What does it mean to them to see the Government reward people who hold two fingers up to the House? The Bill tells the country that it is all right to tear up contracts, because the measures that we pass are contracts with our constituents. When we pass national insurance measures and instruments we levy taxes on people and the agreement is that when they need it, they will get benefit. Now it is being said, "Never mind about that, lads and lasses. We are tearing up that agreement because we are the Government and we can do such things." The Bill may well get its Second Reading, but what will that teach the outside world about honour or about giving one's word or a commitment?

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Surely the contract on national insurance is that the money which is taken under the national insurance heading goes into a fund and is used only for specified purposes such as the provision of unemployment benefit and pensions. Can the hon. Gentleman point to one penny in that fund which has not been used for those purposes? Will he please acknowledge that the fund is used fully for those purposes and that when it is inadequate we use a Treasury supplement? Therefore, we have surely kept our side of the contract.

Mr. Field: I almost despair. The Minister is very able. Often, when that is said in the House, it is said condescendingly, but I do not mean it in that way at all. She knows perfectly well that that is a mind-boggling way of describing what we mean by legal contracts between Governments and those who are governed. We are not saying to people that should the national insurance fund fall into deficit, we may have to increase national insurance charges to meet the bill. What is on offer is the tearing up of a contract that is understood.

Successive Government measures have taught people to encourage the worst side of human nature, and that has the most profound effect on our society. The Bill does that in a further way because it increases the number of people who will be dependent on means-tested benefit. The Secretary of State's answer at Question Time was revealing. I asked him how many people, who thought that they had paid contributions to cover them should they become unemployed, would be pushed on to means-tested benefit now that he is tearing up the contract. He did not know.

The reason that the Bolsheviks so hated the novel "Doctor Zhivago" was that Lara was killed by them and they were so inefficient at going about their killing that they did not even know in which death camp they had done it. The Bill will push a whole army of new people on to means-tested benefits and the Secretary of State who is responsible for the measure does not even know how many will be pushed into that form of dependency.

What means-tested benefits are doing to the moral fibre of this country is important, and it registers in the country even if perhaps it does not register as fully as it should in the House. The problem is no longer marginal. Nearly 10 million households—I am not double counting—depend on one or other of the major means-tested benefits. That is almost half the country; when their dependants are added, it means that some 25 million people, almost half the population, have their standard of living determined to some extent, if not totally, by means-tested assistance. The Bill will increase that number.

When David Piachaud and I coined the phrase in the early 1970s about the poverty trap, I thought of it in a sort of passive way. I thought that people would be on benefit and would find it difficult to disentangle themselves. I now realise how simple that was and how much more complicated life is. Over the period since then, there has been a change in attitudes in respect of honesty, and it extends from the boardroom to the benefit office. Large numbers of people are denied the possibility of full-time, reasonably paid jobs and are offered only part-time jobs. They continue to draw benefits and work on the side. The evil of means-tested assistance is that it is spreading to those other groups who have learned under this Government how to break the law and that it pays to do so. Many people know that the way to survive is to do that.

The hon. Member for Norfolk, North was right when he said that some people were abusing the benefit system and that we should take specific measures against them. My charge against this measure, as against practically all the Government's measures in this field, is that it roughs up all claimants and assumes that they all cheat the taxpayer. The Government lack the courage or the willpower to target measures at those constituents with whom I strongly disagree because they commit fraud against fellow taxpayers. But the Government's measures do not do that.

There are general charges to be made against the Government, but there are also important lessons to be learned for the Opposition from this and similar debates. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was right to say that, at this stage of a Parliament, we would not give details about what would be in our election manifesto. But the lesson that I draw from a stewardship of Tory Governments that has pushed half the population on to means-tested welfare is that disengagement from that will take a long time. We must first be clear about how it is to be done, and it will then take many Parliaments to achieve it.

None the less, it is crucial that Ministers in a Labour Government do not give the sort of response that we have heard from Ministers in this Government, who have always adopted the "short fix" approach. They tend to say, "It looks good now; never mind the long-term consequences." That has led to the society that we now have.

There has been a dispute across the Floor of the House about what Beveridge did or did not say. Beveridge said that a back-up training or work scheme could not be administered at a time of mass unemployment; in those circumstances, control collapsed. Given that—despite what the Government have done to the figures—mass unemployment still exists, it seems proper to give those of our constituents who want to work the right to a job guarantee.

There is no need for compulsion: so many people want jobs that we shall never have to compel them to take what job opportunities exist. If we seriously believe what Conservative Members have said today—if we hate unemployment because it destroys self-worth—we shall judge the Bill a wretched little measure that will do little to deal with fraud, which is in any event a minor problem compared with mass unemployment, and even less to give our constituents who have waited long and hard in the queues for work a chance to add positively to a society to which, unbelievably, many are still proud to belong.

7.41 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), whose views I usually respect. I must, however, disagree with one thing that he has said this evening. He seemed to be saying that it was not possible for Governments to change, clarify or refine policies in mid-term; that could be done only if the change was set out in a manifesto and received the mandate of the population at a general election. Surely Governments must reserve the right during a five-year term to take the steps that they consider necessary to improve systems, focus resources and so forth.

Unusually, hon. Members have said a good deal about "morality" today. I believe that the nation's moral framework still stems from our Christian faith; I am proud to consider myself a committed Christian and I should be delighted to make a few comments about morality.

One reason why the nation's moral fabric is now in disarray is the diminution of our Christian faith since the second world war. If we are to establish a more coherent moral framework, we need to deal with the root problem—the issue of faith. Morality, however, is not just about being nice to people or spending more on welfare; it is not necessarily about acting collectively. There is another side to the morality coin. Morality is also about personal responsibility, about accounting for our lives, about commitment to family and other responsibilities and about not running away from those responsibilities. It is about taking responsibility for our own lives, and not living entirely as we wish.

Of course there is a societal element in morality, but it cannot be discussed only in those terms; individual responsibility is a huge factor. Although I do not agree with every word of it, I find just as much moral content in the contract that is now being discussed in America as in the report on social justice.

All sorts of people become unemployed. Some are genuine, good and decent people who are desperate to find work and ashamed that they do not have it; they hate the idea that they may have to take money from the state. We all know people in that category. But there are also people who are lazy—who prefer idleness to industry. Beveridge, of whom we have heard much this evening, recognised that. There are also those who are dishonest and will skilfully exploit any benefit system to their advantage: even as we speak, many hundreds—if not thousands—are involving themselves in the black economy while drawing benefit. Ideally, wise people would assess each individual on the basis of his needs and motivation and decide his benefit accordingly, but that is not possible in 1995. Hundreds of thousands rely on benefits and we therefore need a system to assess all those people, to draw lines in the sand and to create thresholds if the benefits are to be delivered.

Apparently, some Conservative Members believe that all those who are out of work are layabouts. That is far from the truth. Many of my relatives and long-standing friends in Plymouth have been out of work at times, and have been desperately keen to find work. In the 1980s we heard much from Conservative Members about opportunity and choice, but alongside those two fine words we should place the word "encouragement". We must find ways to encourage those who want to find work and improve their lives to escape and stand on their own two feet.

Ms Eagle: Many would agree with the hon. Gentleman's view that people should be encouraged to take jobs; indeed, I do not think that anyone would disagree. But how does he think that draconian benefit sanctions, which the Bill increases, encourage people to do anything? Do they not simply humiliate people?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Lady does not address the real point. We need to approach the benefit system with both carrot and stick. The jobseeker's allowance is an incentive: it gives people a clear sense of what is expected from them and a clearly defined route through the benefit system, and tells them what they can and cannot achieve.

[Mr. Streeter]

It gives them the encouragement of which I speak. However, we also need an arrangement that cracks down on those who wish to defraud the system. Opposition Members may think that Conservative Members believe that all unemployed people are layabouts, but we do not. Does the hon. Lady believe that all those people are good, honest and decent, and that they lie awake at night saluting the Union Jack and believing in the common good?

Ms Eagle: The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to learn that I do not believe that.

Mr. Streeter: So far this evening, I have not heard any Opposition Member—with the possible exception of the hon. Member for Birkenhead—suggest that there are people who defraud and exploit the benefit system, and have no intention of finding work. We must have a system to deal with those people. I wish that it were otherwise, but we live in the real world. We need systems that include targets, incentives and thresholds, and I believe that the Bill is a step in the right direction.

First, the Bill seeks to target help on those who really need it. There are people out there in the real world for whom we should do much more than we do. However, there are people for whom we do too much and who lean on the state when they should be standing on their own two feet. *[Interruption.]* Yes, both sorts of people are out there. Opposition Members agree that there are people for whom we should do more, but as soon as Conservative Members suggest that there are people—perhaps only two—who lean on the state when they should stand on their own two feet, Opposition Members say, "Oh, no. That is not acceptable as a thesis." One must see both sides of the coin to discuss this issue properly. That is what the Bill seeks to do—to target and to focus.

The Bill does not, of course, solve all the problems of targeting, but it is a step in the right direction. It is good that each claimant, who after all receives money from everyone else in the nation, should enter into a bargain with the taxpayer and should clearly understand what is required of him or her. Earlier, much mockery was made of the fact that people would have to sign an agreement. It is important, however, that they should have to sign up for a package of measures and rights. It means that they are personally engaged in the process, as they should be.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): A constituent of mine is 23 years of age, has worked for the past seven years and has paid class I national insurance contributions. He has recently been made redundant. In an agreement with the Government, he made those contributions on the basis that, if he were made redundant, he would receive a level of benefit for 12 months. He now finds that he will receive that benefit not for 12 months but for six months and that, because he is under 25, the benefit will be further reduced, despite family and other commitments. Is not that a moral breach of an agreement with an individual who has made those contributions since he left school and who, through no fault of his own, has been made redundant in the past few weeks?

Mr. Streeter: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me and all hon. Members in hoping that, as unemployment continues to fall, his constituent will find a job. Two thirds of unemployed people find jobs within the first six months of unemployment. We all know that the contributory scheme is not an investment programme. Through that scheme, we pay today for other people. We do not save for ourselves and for the future.

The second reason why I support the jobseeker's allowance involves the issue of simplicity. It is important to make the benefit system as simple as possible. I welcome the fact that we are merging income support with unemployment benefit and that we have one system, with, I hope, one centre dealing with benefit claims in most cases. That is far better than traipsing from one location to another and filling in other sets of forms. It is important to simplify the benefit system.

Thirdly, I welcome the measure because it gives increased accountability. The provisions state:

> "As under the existing scheme, in order to receive jobseeker's allowance, benefit claimants will have to be available for, and actively seeking, work. The test will be extended to ensure that people who take steps deliberately which undermine their prospects of finding work will be penalised."

I wish that there were not people who took steps deliberately to exclude themselves from work, but all hon. Members know that those people exist. We must make them more accountable to the system.

I also welcome the back-to-work bonus, which is part of this important package of measures. I believe in the concept of stepping stones and of helping people out of unemployment and full-scale benefit dependency and into part-time work to give them a sense of self-esteem. We should also help them go from part-time work to full-time work if that is what they seek. We must take one step at a time. The jobseeker's allowance will help that process.

A young lady works for my wife and me at our home just outside Plymouth. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) will laugh and scoff because that young lady helps my wife with the horses that she owns and enjoys. I am sure that Opposition Members will not accept that it is right and decent for anyone to own horses. In their view, that is a pursuit of the aristocracy.

The young lady, a single parent, was unemployed for several years. She put a card in a local shop asking if anyone would employ her to work with horses. She was desperate to return to such employment. The months went past and no one employed her. My wife saw the card, made contact, had an interview and took her on 12 months ago on a small part-time basis. That small part-time job, however, has developed into a larger part-time job, which will, I hope, one day be a full-time job. It has helped the young lady to get back on her feet and to buy more for her children this Christmas. The benefit system, including family credit, has helped to support that family. We need that sort of system. It works in practice. Opposition Members may scoff at part-time work, but it is an important way back into work and an important stepping stone.

Of course there are people who want only a part-time job. I understand that 85 per cent. of people in part-time work want to work only part-time. Why? Perhaps it suits their family circumstances. Perhaps they feel that they want to spend some part of the day with their young pre-school children. Part-time work is important. How foolish it is for Opposition Members to wish to load burdens onto employers to ensure—it seems almost their wish—that they will cease to employ as many part-time people. How foolish it is to load on employers of such

workers all the employment rights that normally apply to full-time workers. What will be the result of that? Only a reduction in the number of part-time jobs available.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise the non-sequitur of which the Government are constantly and reprehensibly guilty—the fact that many people want part-time work does not imply that they do not want full-time work? For them, part-time work is no good.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman will join me again in rejoicing over the fact that employment is falling so rapidly. Both full-time and part-time jobs are being created. I wish Opposition Members would stop criticising part-time jobs. As I said earlier, they are an important stepping stone into full-time work for people who want it. Some people may want part-time jobs perhaps as a second job for the household or to help them support their family.

The arguments on the minimum wage sound compassionate and excellent in theory. I have no doubt, however, that to impose a minimum wage of £4 a week on a guest house owner in, for example, Newquay for his receptionists, chamber maids and other employees—

Miss Widdecombe: £4 an hour.

Mr. Streeter: £4 a week is what some Opposition Members deserve. Imposing a minimum wage of £4 an hour can have only one result: employers will take on fewer employees. The idea of a minimum wage sounds excellent and compassionate in theory, but in reality it is cruel and callous.

Earlier in the debate, in an exchange between the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and myself, I expressed the view that Opposition Members did not know what it was like to be employers and did not understand how the employment system worked. She says that she has employed people. I am grateful that she acknowledges that fact. I ask her to answer this question. Has she ever had to put her house up as collateral on a business loan? Has she ever lain awake at night worrying about how she will pay the wages that week for her part-time and full-time employees? Has she ever woken up at 5 o'clock in the morning in a cold sweat, worried about where the next order will come from? Until she can answer yes to those questions, she is not qualified to talk about what small businesses, companies and businesses go through in employing people.

The hon. Member for Wallasey scoffed at the fact that the national insurance contribution holiday for long-term unemployed people is only £6 a week. For many small businesses, £6 a week per employee is a significant sum and could mean the difference between taking a person on or not taking him on. Until she has experienced the workplace and been an employer in that business sense, she will have no understanding of that matter.

The Bill has my support. It is an important step in the right direction, but the most important thing that we can do for unemployed people is to create real jobs for them. These measures can be of benefit only within a dynamic economic framework and where there is economic growth. Therefore, is not it good news that we live at a time when there is sustainable economic growth with low inflation and low interest rates and when all the businesses that I visit regularly in my constituency are talking about growth, growing order books, increasing exports and taking on new staff?

The most important thing that any Government can do for their citizens is to provide the economic framework in which jobs are created so that people can find remunerative work which enables them to provide for themselves and their family and to stand on their own two feet. That is the framework in which we are now living. The jobseeker's allowance is worthy of our support. It is a further step towards targeting help to those who really need it and I hope that the House will support it.

8.1 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): We have heard the Secretary of State for Employment claim that the Jobseekers Bill is about more jobs, benefit reform and better services for the unemployed. In reality, it is about the opposite of all those things. It is about job losses, greater dependency, an absolute loss of income for many unemployed people and fewer rights for them all. Far from creating more jobs, the Jobseekers Bill will force more people, especially women, out of work. They will be the partners of unemployed people who, under the present unemployment benefit, which is not means tested, may remain in full or part-time employment for the full 12 months of the benefit. That will change with the shrinking of the contributions-based jobseeker's allowance to six months and the loss of the adult dependency allowance and associated benefits.

On the Government's own figures at least 150,000 unemployed people will be obliged to switch over to the means-tested jobseeker's allowance in its first full year of operation. Their partners will follow them into unemployment as the clawbacks on family income under the means-tested jobseeker's allowance make work financially pointless for them. The inevitable consequence of the jobseeker's allowance will be a massive switch out of jobs and into dependency.

The Government proclaim the advantages of the Jobseekers Bill in terms of benefit reform and it is true that there will be some simplification of the procedures. However, what sort of benefit reform means forcing thousands of our citizens into benefit dependency and the loss or reduction of benefit for thousands more? What logic is it that penalises in particular the 18 to 24-year-olds who have paid national insurance contributions and who receive the same rate of unemployment benefit as all other age groups at present, but who will under the jobseeker's allowance find their benefit cut by 20 per cent? How can it be justified that those who have worked longest and saved the most should suffer most under the jobseeker's allowance?

Anyone who has been a conscientious, hardworking employee all his life but who experiences the catastrophe of unemployment had better beware. If one's savings and redundancy payments amount to more than £8,000—a modest amount at the end of a working life—the unemployment benefit that might be received under the current system will be reduced by half under the jobseeker's allowance. If one claims for a dependent relative, it will be cut by 70 per cent., leaving the princely benefit of £23 a week. In total, nearly one in three male claimants with working partners will lose all entitlement

[Mr. Keith Hill]

to benefit at six months and nearly two out of three female claimants will lose out entirely after six months instead of 12.

Already in our society there is a pervasive anxiety about the threat of unemployment. That is understandable. What family has not been touched by it to some degree? At least those in work used to be able to reassure themselves that what they had paid for by way of national insurance contributions they would, in some measure, get back. They could also feel that their contributions justified their entitlement to benefit. It was a source of self-respect for the out of work which the Government are now undermining by their shrinking of the contributions-based benefit. The new and arbitrary powers of benefit sanctions conferred on minor officials in the Employment Service compounds this loss of respect by a further loss of rights for the unemployed.

The truth is that if one is out of a job, the Jobseekers Bill means a loss of income and a loss of rights. Those two losses mirror the political purposes of the Bill. It is a device to slash public spending regardless of the social cost. It is born out of the continuing Tory conviction that the unemployed have brought it on themselves. What will happen to the £270 million saved by the Bill? Will it be used to help unemployed people? Will it be used for more or better training? The idea is laughable. We all know that it will be put into a pot for electoral bribes later.

The Jobseekers Bill is dressed up as an attack on the work-shy. Yes, authentically work-shy there may be. The White Paper says:

"Experience shows . . . that a small minority seek to abuse the benefit system."

"Experience" is all very well, but who are those people and how many of them are there? The sparsity of the evidence is matched only by an excess of rhetoric such as we have heard in the Chamber tonight.

This year the Secretary of State for Employment—we all know about his vast experience in these matters—instructed the jobcentres to challenge 135,000 claimants about the genuineness of their search for jobs. He wants to take them off benefit. Last year his predecessor set the target at 69,000. Are we to understand that the number of the feckless unemployed has doubled in the past 12 months? It does not matter that every serious study of the unemployed shows that the overwhelming majority hate being out of work and are desperate for jobs. In Tory dogma, if one is unemployed, it is a personal failure and the workshy and the job hungry are all tarred with the same brush. If the Minister disagrees she should listen to the logic of my next observation.

Some of us, perhaps even the Minister, would say that if a person had been in regular employment for all or most of the two years or more before losing a job, it would create a reasonable presumption that such a person was committed to work. After all, what normal person, having worked consistently, would forfeit a regular pay packet to luxuriate on unemployment benefit of £45 or £46 a week, even for 12 months? Yet, such individuals who are out of work through no fault of their own will, under the jobseeker's allowance, pay the penalty for being unemployed by seeing the time in which they are entitled to benefit halved. Under the guise of tackling the work-shy, the Government are penalising the job hungry. The Government's message to the unemployed is that it is their fault that they are out of work; the Government intend to take them by the scruff of the neck and rub their noses in it.

Mr. Heald: The basis of the hon. Gentleman's speech seems to be that these measures will not work, but I can recall that on previous occasions when the Government made suggestions to help the long-term unemployed back to work, the Opposition said exactly the same thing. How does he therefore explain the fact that 250,000 people have gone back to work in the past nine months?

Mr. Hill: I doubt very much that many of them were the long-term unemployed. It does not seem likely that compulsion and coercion are the way to get the long-term unemployed in particular back to work, although compulsion and coercion are the ethos of the measure that we are debating.

The Bill gives significant new powers to Employment Service officials to withhold benefit payments if claimants are judged not to be available for work or actively seeking work. In future, benefits may be stopped if claimants are deemed not to be taking steps

"to present themselves acceptably to employers",

to quote the White Paper. There is enormous scope for the use and abuse of arbitrary judgment in that phrase alone.

Still more threateningly, benefits may now be stopped for up to half a year if a person is considered to have left a job without good cause. The White Paper promised that the legal concepts involved in determining "good cause" would be defined more clearly by legislation. We now know, however, that the definitions do not appear in the Bill but are to be published subsequently in the form of regulations. It appears that a great deal is to emerge in regulations although this is a matter of human and legal rights.

The proposal means that the most permissive and possibly dangerous element of personal interpretation by minor officials will not be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. It is a deeply worrying development and has been made worse—

Miss Widdecombe: What was that?

Mr. Frank Field: My hon. Friend said that it would not be subject to proper scrutiny. We shall not be able to change it—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. This is not the occasion for cosy chats.

Mr. Hill: It is a deeply worrying development which has been made worse by the additional anxiety that front-line jobcentre officials may in future be able to impose benefit sanctions without external adjudication. The fundamental importance of that safeguard is demonstrated by the fact that, in 1993, 44 per cent. of those appealing to the independent adjudication service had their benefits reinstated after they had been stopped by Employment Service staff. That safeguard is not in the Bill, but the Secretary of State for Employment reassured the House today that an independent adjudication procedure will remain in place. It is an essential concession and I invite the Secretary of State or the Minister of State to confirm that the procedure will now be inserted formally into the Bill.

Nevertheless, considerably wider powers for benefit sanctions will appear on the statute book. That is why the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, which represents many of the staff at the Benefits Agency and jobcentres, was absolutely right to warn that such staff will be seen increasingly not as the helpers but as the "policers" of the unemployed.

We can draw no conclusion other than that this measure will add to a climate of coercion and compulsion in the benefit system. It will force many people on to worthless training schemes or into low-paid, temporary or part-time jobs which will be useless for their long-term employment needs. If one asks what the jobseeker's allowance offers unemployed people, the answer is less chance of getting benefit and more chance of losing it.

The Bill will do nothing for the vast majority of unemployed people who sincerely want a job, but it will ensure that losing one's job will be a more painful experience than ever before. That is why the House should reject this mean-spirited and vindictive measure.

8.14 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): This has been a debate of considerable passion, but I was somewhat disappointed to hear the angry words of the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill). For him to describe the Bill as "mean-spirited" and "useless" strikes me as if he has overlooked the main issue, which is that the Bill will give the unemployed every possible opportunity to get back into work. It is the reverse of what the hon. Gentleman suggested.

When passions are running high, it is important to take a step back. While we care deeply about the plight of the unemployed, we do not help if we blind ourselves to reality and clear thinking. It is important to take an almost lateral view of the topic and look at it from the point of view of the unemployed person who is trying to get back into work and from that of the employer who wants to take him into his employ, whether part time or full time, or to undergo training.

I heartily welcome the Bill. Social security costs are escalating and if we do not take firm control now, whichever party happens to be in power in the next century will have a huge problem to solve and the entire community will be shouldering an unbearable cost.

We should examine with a clear mind ways to ensure fair play for all. A minority must not be allowed to take taxpayers for a ride. We have a black economy, and people are in fact stealing when they claim social security while at the same time earning cash in hand. That is to be condemned.

Mr. Flynn: Has the hon. Lady read the book written by the hon. Member presently in conversation with Madam Deputy Speaker? It is called "The Age of Entitlement" and contains a chapter entitled "The Demographic Myth" in which the hon. Gentleman says that the Government have exaggerated the number of elderly people in the next century because they wish to distort policies, as they are doing now? The book was written by the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts).

Lady Olga Maitland: Although I have the greatest respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), it does not necessarily mean that I have to concur with all his comments. I regret to say that I have not read his memorable book, but I shall.

The Bill aims not only to ensure fairness for the taxpayer, who has a responsibility to support those in need, but to encourage those who are out of work to get back into work. It aims to shift the reluctant, which is not always easy. I have talked to them. I can think of one young man who came to my surgery saying that he was a bartender. I said, "If you are not prepared to take work as a bartender, why don't you think of something else to do?" "Oh," he said, "I only want to be a bartender." More than that, he said, "I want to be a bartender only in a particular type of bar." That told me that he did not want to get back to work at all. When I pressed him on the point, he said that he was quite happy to live on a minimal amount because it came from the Government and required him to do nothing. That is unacceptable. It is absolutely right and appropriate that we should create a climate in which people who are young and able-bodied do not sit around because it suits them.

I find it rather depressing that we are now in a new climate in which people are polarised. There are those who are keen to work, who are part of the engine of this country and who are driving it along. We see that tremendous initiative and enterprise in all age groups. There is another, much smaller group—a very unattractive group—who are almost the professional unemployed. They take part in demonstrations, it does not seem to matter which. We saw them demonstrating outside Parliament against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill. We now see demonstrations about animal welfare taking place on the south coast. There is a group of people in that crowd who should be asked clearly and persistently, "What are you doing to try to get back to work? Are you actively seeking a job? Are you genuinely available for work?" I think that there are some who do not fit that category.

The wider picture is that there is undoubtedly positive movement in the job market today. As has been said earlier, the number of jobless has fallen by 45,800 since October. The figure has fallen by almost half a million since December 1992. More than that, in my constituency, the unemployment figure is now down by 3 per cent. and is only just above the level of the late 1980s.

Ms Eagle: The hon. Lady has just mentioned the unemployment figures in her constituency. Does she know how many vacancies there are in her constituency in comparison with the number of people who are searching for them?

Lady Olga Maitland: I shall come to that point later in my address. I can only say that the number of vacancies is rising excitingly.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Lady referred to the jobless in her constituency. Does she accept that in the past five years, unemployment has risen by a staggering 164 per cent?

Lady Olga Maitland: I will not agree to the figure of 164 per cent., but I agree that there has been a rise in unemployment. The truth is that today, unemployment is down. More than that, I draw the attention of the House to a reply that I received from the Minister of State, Department of Employment. She tells me that the Employment Service has placed almost 2 million people in jobs in the past year, which is 16 per cent. more than in the previous year. That has to be a triumph and one on which we can build.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

It is not just a matter of us getting more people back into work, although we must continue to strive to do so. We must also show considerable imagination. I congratulate the Government on having, to date, 15 different schemes and initiatives to help people back into work.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): There are 23 schemes.

Lady Olga Maitland: I stand corrected. I understand that there are 23 different schemes, which is even better than I had expected. The schemes build on the £600 million package of work incentives which were announced last November.

I give the House a taste of the initiatives that have been put into motion. There is the travel-to-interview scheme whereby unemployed people can no longer say that they cannot go for an interview because they cannot afford the fare. That particularly applies when the interview is outside their home area.

I especially appreciate the job search seminars which offer coaching to unemployed people to help them develop their job-hunting techniques and interview skills. That is extremely important. Often people who are not very articulate do not know how to present themselves when they go out into the job market. Some of them barely have a clear idea of exactly what they can do and what they want to do. No employer will take on an applicant who turns up with a muddled approach and, perhaps, an untidy and messy appearance. If such applicants only had a bit of forethought, training and assistance, they could give a much better justification of their real skills.

I have great praise for the system of job clubs all over the country. I have seen them being effective in helping very demoralised people in inner-city areas, such as Tower Hamlets and Haringey. In my constituency as well, people get tremendous moral support from coming together, talking to other people in the same plight and getting one-to-one advice and support in their job applications.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell) for his work over a long period in encouraging workfare or, as it is known in this country, the workstart pilot schemes. I very much hope that one day I shall be able to visit one of the pilot schemes—I understand that all four of them are up in Norfolk—which are well worth seeing. The Secretary of State for Employment would be well advised to think carefully about how these schemes can be developed. Helping the long-term unemployed into work can only benefit everyone in society, not just the individuals concerned.

Mr. O'Hara: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady's eulogy about efforts to put people back into work in her constituency. I happen to have some statistics here; one must put the matter into context. Unemployment in the hon. Lady's constituency has gone down by 19 per cent. in the past year, but by only 1 per cent. in the past three years. Indeed, in 1989-90, unemployment went up by 148 per cent.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. Gentleman still overlooks the fact that unemployment is down; he is juggling with statistics. For the man who has managed to get a job, that job means a tremendous amount. The truth is that the Labour party would almost die rather than admit that schemes operated by the Government are a success.

I pay tribute to another Government scheme—the jobfinder's grant—under which up to £200 is provided to an applicant for tools for his trade. I understand from my local jobcentres that that could have quite a significant effect on those who are in manual work, whether painters and decorators or carpenters, and who have felt that a lack of capital support for buying essential tools has kept them out of the job market when they could easily be back in it.

We must, of course, understand the mood and morale of someone who is without a job. I have seen such people being deeply demoralised, especially those who, as has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House, have worked for 20 or 25 years and who suddenly, in mid-life, are cut off in their prime. I have felt deeply when I have talked through those problems with people who have come to see me. I understand their feelings and I can feel their shock.

There is, however, another group whom we must take into account. We must teach them how to be more flexible in their approach to finding new work and how to be more imaginative. My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) asked earlier how we could teach people initiative and enterprise. I believe that we can by raising people's confidence, self-esteem and self-worth, and by giving them the feeling that they count for something and that they are important. It is amazing how, once that framework is in their minds, they can leap over a mountain that they had not believed they could leap over. All that could be done is being done through the framework provided in the Jobseekers Bill. I find that the problems of apathy are very serious, especially among the young.

I shall digress for a moment on the subject of the young. The time has come when we should try to create a climate in which we educate the young not to start families until they know that they are on a job ladder. It is staggering to read cases, such as that recently reported in the newspapers of a young girl who had her first baby while she was aged 14, who is now aged 16 and is expecting her third child, while her partner—they are not married—is only 19. How could they possibly have thought that they were ready to support a family when there was no job on hand? They were clearly burdened with their domestic problems and it somehow escaped them that they would have a moral obligation, if they were to have a family, to ensure that they would be able to provide for their children. That is known as moral responsibility.

It would be a great help if, in bringing up young people through the education system, they were taught to understand that having children is an obligation of responsibility, which means ensuring that they accept training and, by the same token, ensure that they embark on a career and have a job structure before they start with the expenses of having children. Indeed, it denies children security if their parents willy-nilly bring them into the world without any thought or planning.

It is very important to recognise those people who have been caught in the benefit trap, who want to get out and want to get back to work. The Bill will do just that. The Bill especially delights me—it is a relief—because

through it the triplicate form-filling, the complicated administration of seeking support and getting back to work will come to an end and we shall be able to replace the out-of-date, confusing two-benefit system. That is right. It is long overdue. Undoubtedly, the measures in the Bill will be easier to understand and will streamline administration, which in turn will mean better targeting and improved services for the jobless. In the end, the individuals who are seeking help will feel that one-to-one relationship, which we want to build, so that they have a sense of commitment not only to agreeing to look for work but to those to whom they will be answerable.

I welcome the suggestion that people should sign an agreement demonstrating their commitment to returning to work. That is very important. It is very easy for people to slide into a benefits syndrome without realising that it takes two to tango—the providers of the benefit and the recipients. It takes two to recognise that they have a job to work together to get that unemployed person back into the work force. Signing an agreement emphasises that commitment. It would be of great benefit to build on the programme, which the Government have already started, of working out a planned job search and helping unemployed people with the whole mechanics of looking for work. Making the process more formal and more structured can only be to everyone's benefit.

I also welcome the stick and carrot approach. On the one hand, we have the stick, the commitment and the sanctions as they are applied, and on the other we have the carrot, the tax-free, back-to-work bonus, which will undoubtedly encourage people to leave the benefits system in the long term, particularly those who have been working part-time. The stepping stone of part-time work is an essential part of building up self-confidence, about which we should not in any way be embarrassed or shy. Staff in my local jobcentre are confident that the back-to-work bonus will take off and will work. They are, after all, the people at the coal face and can speak with authority.

We were talking earlier about the opportunities of getting people back into work. The good news is that there are more opportunities today than there have been in the past few years. Certainly in my constituency there are more jobs now in the retail trade; in shops. There are more jobs in clerical work. There are also more jobs in the building trade, which is very significant, although, admittedly, those jobs command slightly lower wages than they did in the past.

One word of advice that I would give to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is that although it is all very well getting the training schemes well established, as we have, we nonetheless need to match them with more work experience. That applies especially to school leavers who, at the moment, in some schools, are put on a two-week job opportunity or work experience scheme, which can work very well. Sadly, not enough schools are pushing that scheme hard enough. To give young people that first taste of the real world of work is an enormous help, not only in training, but because an employer can see that they have had some experience of an office environment.

I am disappointed that the Labour party is still absolutely dedicated to the idea of a minimum wage. It strikes me that that is a windmill which we will have to knock to the ground. Labour Members are raising people's expectations falsely and they are doing no favours to the 2 million people who will undoubtedly lose jobs as a result of a minimum wage. I find it strange that even Labour Members have admitted that there are flaws in their own scheme. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), when he was interviewed by Brian Walden on London Weekend Television, said:

> "I knew the consequences were that there would be some shake-out, any silly fool knew that".

It would be wise if the Labour Government took heed of their own errors in the past. It should be remembered that every Labour Government for more than 60 years have presided over an increase in unemployment.

I trust now that Labour Members will support the Bill and realise, in their anxiety to get people back to work, that the Bill is undoubtedly the best possible chance for all people who are fearful, afraid, need help and need support. We have now got it for them.

8.37 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Secretary of State referred in his speech to the living memory of hon. Members in the House. He may well have been thinking of the strange anniversary, on the seventh day of this month, which marked exactly 60 years since the Unemployment Assistance Board came into being. That board originated from a decision made by Ramsay MacDonald's Government of 1931 to limit the duration of unemployment benefit to six months. It is interesting to think that that system may well be coming back, because then many of the benefits were paid by local authorities.

That Government also introduced a system decreeing that unemployed people would have to undergo a means test. That may not be in the memory of many hon. Members, but it is certainly in the memory of my family, as my father was one of the people in that period who underwent that means test, having suffered from a war injury which meant that he never worked again. I remember how embittered he was throughout the rest of his life because, a short while after that means test, the War Department decided to change his pension from an amount which was attributed to his war wound—he was shot—to an amount which was aggravated by his war wound.

The bitterness felt by that generation is about to be reproduced. The Government at the time decided to nationalise the means testing of the unemployed. The Unemployment Assistance Board, which was invented by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Neville Chamberlain—who had his problems later on—applied itself to its task with such enthusiasm that, in the first month of its operation, it brought this country closer to revolt than at any time this century. Hundreds of thousands of families found their incomes savagely reduced. Hon. Members of all parties and from all parts of the country protested loudly.

After only four weeks of the new scheme, the Minister of Labour rose in the House to announce a standstill. The cuts made to that point were cancelled and arrears were paid. Until new regulations could be introduced, the Unemployment Assistance Board was to pay each unemployed person the amount payable under existing regulations or what that person received previously from the local authority. There was rejoicing in the valleys

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

because the valleys of south Wales were among the most generous and fair in respect of the amounts they paid in benefits.

Those events are worth recalling because the Government are embarking on a repetition of the actions of their predecessors. Once again, in April 1996, the duration of unemployment benefit is to be cut to six months. That is an exact replica of the earlier system. Benefit rates are to be cut and, once again, there will be a big increase in the number of unemployed people who are subjected to means testing.

We heard the myth from Conservative Members tonight. We heard it principally from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who has just spoken, and from the Secretary of State, when he spoke on Radio 4 the other day. It was difficult to find any room for thought between the Secretary of State's populist rants. Conservative Members continue to talk about taxpayers' money and about a contract.

When the jobseeker's scheme was originally introduced, the Government said that the reason for it was that unemployment benefit was not much different from income support. They are absolutely right about that. The fact that an insured benefit has decreased to the level of the safety net has not occurred by magic.

What has happened is an extraordinary story. The main thrust behind Beveridge was not simply the fairness of a national insurance scheme. He was interested in the efficiency of such a scheme. As Beveridge pointed out at the time, a multiplicity of private insurance companies collected a few pence every week for all kinds of insurance benefit. Fifty per cent. of the premiums paid were dissipated or wasted. The scheme was very clumsy.

That is precisely what is happening now as the Government are trying to force people into highly inefficient private pensions and private benefits in respect of which there are two major problems: first, the schemes pay poor benefits, and 4 million people in personal pensions will curse this Government when they reach old age because they have been forced into such schemes; and, secondly, the people whom the Government are telling to take out schemes to insure their mortgages and to protect themselves from unemployment are the very people who cannot afford the premiums because they are at high risk.

Let us consider what has happened to unemployment benefit over a period when premiums have risen by 40 per cent. and 50 per cent. There has been a huge increase in premiums. However, while there should have been an increase in the rate of unemployment benefit in comparison to the rate in 1979, there has been a decrease for a family of 41 per cent., if we consider the figures in line with prices, and of 56 per cent., if we consider the figures in line with earnings—which is the best line to take.

The Government have taken an insured benefit; they have jacked up the premiums by a huge percentage, but they have cut the amount received by 50 per cent. When the Secretary of State was speaking this evening, I was speaking on the telephone, in a routine call, to a young man in my constituency. That young man was in despair. He had been through the system. He had been on the schemes and had done what the Government had told him to do. He tried to do a training course, but met obstacle after obstacle. The latest obstacle related to a job as a professional driver in respect of which he faced an insurmountable premium for that scheme. He is one of the many people who have been through the whole gamut of lost opportunity and who have faced all those blank walls. Nothing in the Bill will help that young man.

The Bill is so mean that even the much-vaunted back-to-work bonus, which in principle is not a bad idea and has some merit, is to be affected. On 12 December, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the temporary hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), admitted that the Government were going to claw back money from the back-to-work bonus scheme. They are going to make a profit from it. They cannot keep their greedy little hands off it.

The whole point of the wretched scheme is to try to claw back money from the worst-off and to cheat them on national insurance to build up the bribe that the Government hope to offer in the next general election. Everyone knows what is happening. The Government have advertised the bribe so often that it will not work. They should learn that lesson.

Miss Widdecombe: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's comments about the back-to-work bonus. Given that at the moment, over and above the disregard, we take away pound for pound and that, in future, we are going to give back 50 per cent. of the remaining earnings up to a maximum of £1,000, how are we profiteering from the back-to-work bonus?

Mr. Flynn: If the Minister reads *Hansard* of 12 December, she will see that the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security admitted that the change would produce savings for the Government. He said:

"Further information is currently being collected to allow this to be assessed."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 535-56.]

The Minister will have to ask her hon. Friend the Under-Secretary how that is to be achieved, because that is what he said.

The Government are treating the whole business as an attempt to disguise a cut in benefits and as a way to force the unemployed into the ritual humiliation described by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth). I crossed swords with the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon about the 1920s and Beveridge, but I discovered later in his speech that he knew precisely what the effects of the actively seeking employment test and the other tests were.

Beveridge said that the actively seeking work rule in the 1920s was a humiliating and futile experience. When it was used, unemployed people in south Wales could not receive benefits unless they proved that they had actively been seeking work. Unemployed people from Rhondd Fach had to cross the valley to the Rhondd Fawr and the unemployed from the Rhondd Fawr had to cross the valley to the Rhondd Fach. That simply used up shoe leather. However, they had to get a stamp. A member of the Labour Ministry at the time disguised himself as an

unemployed person and wrote a book on the subject called "The Myth of the Scrounger" in which he made the point that the only people who—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is becoming difficult to hear the hon. Member because of other people's muttered interventions.

Mr. McCartney: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The reason for the muttered interventions is that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) spoke for 25 minutes, keeping both Opposition and Conservative Members from taking part in the debate. She has now left the Chamber before my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has finished his speech, contrary to normal practice.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware.

Hon. Members: Yes, but it is a courtesy.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I can deal only with matters of order.

Mr. Flynn: When that rule was changed, Beveridge said that it would never rise again from its dishonoured grave because of its futility and cruelty to the unemployed. As we have heard, seek and ye shall not find. That is precisely the theme of the Bill. Its title is meaningless in terms of its purpose. It is about a cut in unemployment benefit, and a vicious, thoroughly unjustified one. It is a breach of faith to millions of people, wrapped up and disguised in a confidence trick.

8.49 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I shall make a short contribution as I know that hon. Members are extremely keen to speak. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate.

I am proud to represent Ribble Valley, which has the lowest unemployment in Great Britain, but that does not mean that I am complacent. Just before Christmas, one of the factories in the village in which I live closed, making more than 100 people unemployed. Just before Christmas is never a good time to do such a thing, but it made the misery even more unbearable for families in the village. Although the vast majority will find jobs in 1995, some people may not. I must be extremely conscious that for each unemployed person in a constituency, irrespective of the level of unemployment, it is a personal tragedy for them and for their families.

I am also conscious of the point made by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) about people who are getting on in years becoming unemployed; it becomes increasingly difficult for them to find work. We must direct more attention to people in their mid-50s who are looking for work. We have an aging population, and we must pay far more attention to the quality of people in their 50s who are looking for work. They still have a massive amount to contribute.

The jobseeker's allowance is a welcome simplification of the system. There was reference to the benefit reducing from 12 months to six months. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and others questioned whether Labour Members would reverse that position if they regained office. We simply could not obtain an answer from Labour Members. It is as though they are afraid to make any commitment until just before the election, when they will pounce on the electorate and say, "This is what we are going to do." It is as though they are afraid that any of their policies could possibly be costed between now and the next general election.

Opposition Members have suffered greatly in the past. We know that their figures did not add up, and I suspect that they will not add up in future. Opposition Members have decided to hide their commitments until the very last moment. They will have an opportunity toward the end of the debate to consider one of their famous U-turns and say whether they would reverse the legislation which I hope will be passed tonight.

The contract is important. It is between those who are employed and those who are unemployed, as well as many others. One side will contribute through their taxes to ensure that those who are unemployed are given opportunities to make a real contribution. It is important to have a job, just for the sake of self-worth and to give people a purpose to life and self-respect. Like most hon. Members, I believe that the vast majority of people want to work. We must give them that opportunity. We must give them a hand, not just a handout, because the latter does not give an unemployed person a more realistic chance of a job.

We have gone through a deep recession. People who survived the previous recession untouched have been hit by the next one. Businesses have gone through a particularly bad time. We have a record number of self-employed and small business people. They have made a real commitment. Many of them have their houses tied up in their businesses. If their businesses fail, they will risk losing their houses as well. Some of those people have suffered greatly. They work all the hours that God sends. They must consider how much it costs to employ people and how they will find the money to pay the wages bill at the end of the week or at the end of the month. They are our entrepreneurs. We must do as much as we possibly can to give them incentives to start and to give those who have started the opportunity to grow and to take on other unemployed people. It is our duty to ensure that those conditions exist.

It is not an easy option to start a business these days; it is a big risk. It is difficult to obtain capital in the first place. Woe betide businesses if they make a profit, because many Opposition Members think that that is wrong and that those businesses should be taxed. Making a profit is a disincentive for Opposition Members. I hope that all hon. Members give credit to small businesses and the people who work hard and make their contribution. Conservative Members talk about ensuring that we will give every business man a chance. Opposition Members and others scoff, but we must ensure that such people are given a chance.

Opposition Members cannot have it both ways. They talk about giving people the opportunity for work and, in the same breath, they talk about the minimum wage, which will make more than 1 million people unemployed. They talk about limiting the working week and about piling social costs on to employers—all with good intentions, no doubt—but I hope that people will remember that each of those on-costs has a cost itself. It is a cost like a tax; it takes away opportunities for business people to invest and it takes away the incentive for them to put in greater hours and to take greater risks.

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

Opposition Members rush like lemmings to sign up to anything that comes out of Europe, backing any socialist claptrap that emerges from the cauldron which boils in Brussels. They have been to the socialist mountain top and they want to jump off and to take opportunity and hope with them. We must ensure that they do not have the chance to do that. The one great difference between socialists and Conservatives is that socialists talk about caring, yet all the policies that they want to introduce fly in the face of it. We Conservatives must get on with caring. We must deliver the goods, just as we have done over the past 15 years.

I was proud to serve on the Standing Committee that considered the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill last year. It was an excellent start. We must ensure that the deregulation initiative has another thrust this year to ensure that the on-costs on businesses are stripped away so that business is given even more opportunity to invest and grow.

Given all the initiatives about which we have talked, opportunities for employment will grow in 1995. There was a fantastic start throughout 1994, and we must ensure that it continues. It is said that two thirds of those who become unemployed find work in the next six months. We must ensure that many more do so in 1995.

The one great thing that is always hidden when monthly unemployment statistics are produced and it is said that unemployment has fallen by 43,000 or 50,000 is the massive flow of people throughout the system who have either gone into or come out of employment. The days when one went into a job at 16 and stayed there for the rest of one's natural working life have gone. There is far more flexibility within the work force. We must recognise that. There are more opportunities to take not just one career but more than one career.

I applaud the work of the employment services. Last year, I visited the employment services in Clitheroe and in Preston. They are doing tremendous work to help people into employment. The contract between those who are seeking work and the Government is right. It will ensure that those who are unemployed receive exactly the right help that they will need to go into employment as soon as possible.

Like many other people, I also believe that—even if we put the question of fraud on one side—when people are simply not interested in finding work and just want to live off the state, we must clamp down as much as we can, because what those people do costs the country a great deal of money. It is also a massive disincentive and a slap in the face for all the people who get up early in the morning and go out and do a day's work—especially those who work at a job in which they have no great interest, yet who want to do that work for reasons of self-respect. We must ensure that others do not ride on their backs.

The many Government schemes already in operation to help people get back to work have already been mentioned. They exemplify what we must do. We must try to provide help for the people who need such help to get into work. With the jobseeker's allowance, people will get that help, and we shall ensure that the contract signed between the unemployed and the Government is fulfilled, so as to help everybody and to give everybody a better chance in 1996 when the proposals come into effect.

8.58 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): I remember listening with incredulity when, in the 1993 Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the jobseeker's allowance as a measure to help the unemployed gain employment. It was a similar experience listening to the Secretary of State today. The Bill is not about helping the unemployed to gain jobs but about helping the unemployed to lose benefit, helping their partners to lose their jobs and helping the unemployed to lose the meagre rights and choices on training and employment that they already have.

The underlying economic rationale of the Bill, apart from public expenditure cuts to pay for next year's tax bribes, is to force the unemployed into ever-lower paid employment. And the Bill is shot through with the nasty social authoritarianism of the new Tory right, as typified by the two Secretaries of State who have been jostling for the lead role in introducing it.

The main mechanism to help the unemployed to lose their benefits is, of course, the six-month cut-off point; 30 per cent. of men and 57 per cent. of women will lose all right to benefit after six months because they will not qualify for the income-related allowance. The system is even worse for certain groups of people, such as the young. If a young person has a partner or is married, only 40 per cent. of the benefit that would have been paid under the old system in a year will be paid. Someone older who has received redundancy money and who has a dependent partner will receive only 30 per cent. of what would have been paid under the old system.

Things are no better for someone with a married partner. The increase in means-testing will drive many partners of unemployed people out of jobs. It will not be worth their while to work because if they do their partners will not be able to claim benefit. Again, women will probably be more adversely affected. What is more, like many people who cease to qualify for the jobseeker's allowance after six months, the people driven out of work in that way will not figure in the unemployment statistics, because there will be no reason for them to sign on.

Unemployed people are not only being cheated of unemployment benefit. It is worse than that; many of them will be denied jobseeker's allowance, too. One of the most alarming parts of the Bill appears in clauses 15 and 16, which describe how all sorts of new ways will be devised to deprive unemployed people of their legitimate benefit entitlements.

The first such concern is the length of time for which people may be denied jobseeker's allowance. Clause 15 twice mentions a period of between one and 26 weeks. We have also been told that hardship payments will be denied to many people who are disqualified, although I do not believe that that is mentioned in the Bill.

The second concern is about who will make the decisions. On the first day of this year *The Observer* contained an article about a leaked document from the Department of Employment suggesting that many decisions would be made by front-line Employment Service staff rather than being referred to an adjudication officer. I hope that the Minister will touch on that question in winding up. Given the number of wrong decisions now made, the proposal causes serious worry.

The third big area for concern is the increase in the number of reasons for imposing benefit penalties. The jobseeker's direction is the most notorious of those, and the aspect that has had most publicity is the idea that someone may be disqualified because of a jobseeker's direction relating to his or her appearance or behaviour. That is a good example of the social authoritarianism that I mentioned earlier.

There are many other reasons why people may be disqualified, some of which build on things that are already happening. People are already losing benefit if they refuse to go on certain courses, and that trend will be increased and intensified by the Bill. If people were being sent on real training courses it might not be so bad, but the training budget for next year is being cut by 20 per cent. and many of the courses that people will be forced to follow, on pain of losing benefit, are not genuine training courses.

The other big turn of the screw will be forcing people to take undesirable and unacceptable employment. Not many people lose benefit on the grounds of refusing employment, but the Bill explicitly states that many people will now lose benefit or incur penalties if they refuse to take a particular job. That is one of the underlying reasons behind the Bill. There are a number of undesirable jobs which people rightly do not want because of their appalling wages or conditions, but people will be forced into those jobs. As more people are driven into low-paid employment, the larger pool of people in low-paid employment will drive low wages even lower. That is the economic thinking behind the Bill.

I shall touch on other aspects of the Bill more briefly than I wanted to because other Members want to speak. One thing that has concerned me following constituency casework is the way in which people are unjustly disqualified from benefit because of alleged misconduct on leaving a job, and that will get worse following the Bill. At least a person has six months' disqualification followed by six months' unemployment benefit at the moment, but it appears in the Bill that that person will now get six months' disqualification followed by no benefit at all. There are appalling problems in the Employment Service in relation to that measure.

Recently I attended a social security appeal tribunal with one of my constituents almost one year after he had lost his job. He had had a six-month disqualification, and his appeal was at last heard 11 months after he lost his job. As happens in the majority of cases, it was discovered that he should not have had his benefit disqualified, and he got it back 11 months after losing his job. The Minister should look at that, and also at the good report from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux about the matter which came out last month.

Another area to which I wish to refer is the tightening of the availability for work rules. Clause 6—I do not have the time to go into it in detail, but the matter was dealt with well by my hon. and learned Friend for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner)—suggests that the rules will become even tighter. At the moment, we are told that there is a target of 135,000 people having their benefit stopped this year for not actively seeking work.

Another constituent of mine recently had his benefit stopped, despite the fact that he was studying for only five hours a week. There is a technical rule which has been pushed through that someone who is paying more than £100 for fees—even if he is studying for only five hours a week—will have his benefit stopped. Fortunately for my constituent, his fees were being paid through a bursary and I managed to challenge that ruling. But that is happening already, and clause 6 suggests that it will intensify. It is alarming that clause 6 states that "availability for employment" and "actively seeking employment"

"have such meaning as may be prescribed."

We can only worry and wonder about what those meanings might be.

We need positive action from the Government to tackle the problems which the unemployed face. A minimum wage is a key demand, and others include a supply of appropriate jobs, high-quality training, the abolition of the 21-hour rule and reform of the earnings disregard regulations which hold a lot people out of employment. In the Bill, the higher disregard for the long-term unemployed is being abolished. We also need the preservation of the social insurance principle.

The Government are running out of steam when it comes to doing anything positive for the unemployed, but, unfortunately, they are not running out of steam when it comes to attacking the unemployed and driving the wages of people lower and lower. I hope that this will be one of the last bankrupt Acts of this bankrupt Government, who cannot go too soon.

9.8 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) reflected some of the differences which we have seen all too often during past weeks in the Labour party. He said that having a jobseeker's direction on an issue such as appearance was ludicrous. I think that that was the word the hon. Gentleman used. Other Labour Members have said the same thing.

Yet who was it—only few months ago—who said of the jobseeker's direction:

"If it is simply a matter of dress, deportment and drawing up a good curriculum vitae, or trying to motivate people, no one could object."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1994; Vol. 248, c. 635.]?

Yes, it was the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). So again we see that the Labour party simply cannot agree on these issues. We have heard today in *The Guardian* about the differences over Europe. We have heard about the differences over clause IV and on education. On employment, we have heard the same story again today.

Britain has been able to deal more effectively with unemployment than other European countries because of the regime that the Conservative Government have put in place. Speaker after speaker has criticised the measures in the Bill and assumed that they will not work. However, the evidence is that the measures that the Government have put in place are working.

When I was elected in 1992 my constituency had higher unemployment than it does now. The same is true of the constituencies of most hon. Members. I can see Members on the Opposition Benches of which exactly the same is true. In my constituency unemployment has fallen by 1,000 in the past year alone. When we consider why that is and compare ourselves with our partners in Europe, the answer is clear. We have a competitive economy. We have a spirit of entrepreneurship. We have the lowest business taxes in Europe, the lowest on-costs, one of the

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

lowest levels of Government borrowing, low inflation and a good quality work force who have been highly trained as a result of the activities of the Government.

We often hear from Opposition Members about structural unemployment, but Britain is the only country in Europe which is successfully tackling that problem. Twenty million people across Europe are unemployed, but in Britain, uniquely, unemployment is falling. We have one of the highest levels of labour participation.

When we deal with an issue such as jobseeking and the unemployed, we have to recognise that people have responsibilities and duties as well as rights. I mentioned the hon. Member for Garscadden a moment ago. Let us have a little wisdom from him on this subject, too. He said on 22 October 1992, two years ago:

"I'm certainly not afraid to say we should go and look at the argument that there are responsibilities and duties, as well as rights, for those who are on benefit".

I see that he agrees today that that is right.

Can we seriously argue that people have responsibilities and duties if we do nothing about it when people breach them? There must be some sanctions as well as incentives. I argue that the sanctions proposed in the Bill are the minimum required to enforce the rights and obligations that are imposed by the Bill.

First, the test of availability for work will be that people should actively seek work. That will be extended to ensure that people who take steps which deliberately undermine their prospects of finding work will be penalised. I should have thought that people who do not actively seek work should face a penalty. That is the basic contract between the taxpayer and the person involved. The person should be available for work full time for a minimum of 40 hours. If people expect to receive benefit full time, they should be prepared to work full time.

If Opposition Members criticise and say that it is wrong that people should be deprived of benefit if they are not making the effort that the Government require through jobcentres, what are they saying? They are saying that if people do not fulfil their obligations and duties, nothing should happen and people should be allowed to continue merrily without facing any sanction. That cannot be right.

Similarly with the jobseeker's direction, if the contract between the jobseeker and the Department, along with advice and guidance and the element of compulsion, does not succeed in helping the person back into work, why should there not be a direction to give that person the help and encouragement that is needed to get back into work?

Let us consider the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) employed. He described a situation in which many elderly people have been out of work for extended periods and said that one cannot force them to look for work. He is saying that, if one is elderly, one can be written off and that one need not be required to look for work. He was being ageist. Opposition Members may laugh, but older claimants should be encouraged. They should have the same opportunities and should be dealt with in the same way as any other claimant, on a level playing field.

When I recently visited my jobcentre—it is one of the new integrated centres, in which the advice and benefit services are provided in one place—it was pointed out that the centre actively encourages employers to consider older applicants and that, if the latter do not receive the encouragement that the Government believe to be vital, we are doing neither them nor the taxpayer justice.

If the Government are prepared to make the effort through the jobcentres, elderly claimants should not say that they are not prepared to make the effort to find work because they believe that it is hopeless. It is wrong for hon. Members to argue that, unfortunately, it is impossible to find work if one is elderly. We often hear such arguments about education from Opposition Members. They say that in inner city areas the situation is hopeless, one cannot expect to achieve much and that there is no point making comparisons or publishing tables as the children will never succeed. They are using exactly the same argument for the elderly.

The Government, through the encouragement that they are giving jobseekers in the Bill, are attacking some of the main issues. I confess that I am an adviser to the Federation of Recruitment and Employment Services, which deals with the private recruitment industry. Its members have frequently pointed out to me that jobseekers are concerned that they do not receive adequate encouragement to take jobs and that it is easier for them to be dependent, even though they may not receive as much benefit, than to take a job. Some of the measures in the Bill will tackle that head on. For example, the back-to-work bonus available under the scheme will encourage people to leave benefit by taking part-time work as a stepping stone to full-time work.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Does my hon. Friend agree that the package contains a range of incentives for all unemployed people to get back into employment and that it gives them a chance that the Opposition would deny? It extends the challenge and the chance to seek employment, which many people would not get under the present system. The Opposition are trying to sabotage people's efforts to gain employment. They are hurting the unemployed by resisting these measures.

Mr. Heald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. Not only will the Bill simplify the benefits system, but, as he said, it will provide the unemployed with the opportunity to get back into work.

The back-to-work bonus scheme is one of the methods being used. In addition, let us not forget the employment-on-trial scheme, which will enable the claimant to take a job after three months of unemployment, without incurring any penalty if he voluntarily decides that the job is not for him within a period not exceeding four weeks. Many unemployed people facing the difficult decision to try a different area of endeavour will welcome that opportunity.

Much has been made of the fact that couples and individual spouses will have no opportunities under the jobseeker's allowance. But a strength of the new system is that the period in which a partner is allowed to work will be increased to 24 hours without loss of entitlement to benefit. The Bill will therefore make a considerable contribution to getting unemployed people back to work.

My constituency suffered the difficulties of cuts in the defence industry, as did some other constituencies. In Hertfordshire, a task force approach was taken, with the county council, the TEC, the local authorities, business clubs and so on working together to try to promote employment. That approach has succeeded and, now that

the business side is right, we need employees to get back to work with proper training so that Hertfordshire can continue to succeed as it has over so many years. Since I became a Member of Parliament, unemployment in my constituency has fallen and I believe that it will fall faster as a result of this measure.

9.22 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Even the Bill's name is flawed. The switch from unemployment benefit to jobseeker's allowance is a cruel joke at a time of mass unemployment. It is Orwellian wordplay of the highest order. Unemployment benefit is compensation for being unemployed, paid for by national insurance contributions. The jobseeker's allowance is allowed to failed jobseekers who are encouraged to blame themselves for the position in which they find themselves.

Other aspects of the Bill are equally Orwellian and sinister. There is an authoritarian behavioural requirement for jobseekers, the exact details of which are not in the Bill but will be put before us in regulations at a later date. The compulsory jobseeker's agreement is a new twist in benefit sanction and is illiberal in what is meant to be a democratic state. In that respect, I associate myself almost entirely with the arguments put forward in the interesting speech of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who uttered many warnings to which his party should listen.

We have no information on the meaning of the "jobseeker's direction" or on what will be required of people unfortunate enough to be out of work. Will they be expected to cut their hair, lose weight or change the colour of their skin? After all, discrimination exists in the job market and we need reassurance from the Government about what people will be put through in order to keep the increasingly meagre benefits allowed by the Bill.

My objection to the Bill is that it is written and designed as if to deal with the most incorrigible recalcitrants who will never have work. Those regulations are then applied to everybody, regardless of their circumstances. The Bill assumes that unemployment benefit claimants, who are the victims of the Government's economic incompetence, are all lazy, work-shy shirkers who need to be forced into a job. The reality is very different. The vast majority of unemployed people are desperate to work and their mental health suffers on the dole. The benefits on which they live are now so low that they live on or below the poverty line. The Bill will worsen that—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have had occasion before, although the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) was not present, to deal with sedentary interventions.

Ms Eagle: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As the hon. Member for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell) pointed out, the Bill has a massive hole in it. The Government abdicate their responsibility to create jobs for jobseekers and make a virtue out of it. They do not recognise the duty accepted by all previous post-war Governments to maintain a stable and high level of employment. On the contrary, they reward highly paid managers of privatised utilities for destroying a massive number of jobs.

In my constituency in Merseyside, 82,410 people are currently unemployed and there are 5,186 job vacancies. That means that 16 people are chasing each job. In my constituency there are 3,882 unemployed people and 157 vacancies, which means that 25 people are chasing each job.

I object to the Bill because it blames the 24 out of 25 people in Wallasey who are unsuccessful in obtaining those jobs. It punishes them for not succeeding, but as the simple application of logic makes obvious, only one out of the 25 can succeed in filling the vacancy. A better CV, a haircut or even gleaming teeth will not help the other 24 people to succeed.

The Bill is introduced at a time when structural changes in the labour market are obvious. There is casualisation, segmentation, further deregulation and reductions in pay, all of which create instability. People move in and out of employment and are sometimes stuck in unemployment and are punished for it.

The Bill contains no analysis of the reasons for unemployment and makes no attempt to meet the needs of the unemployed. It contains very large sticks with which to beat them. That is why it is so objectionable and why we should return to a system in which the unemployed are accorded fairness, dignity and rights. They should not be treated in this authoritarian and obnoxious way by a Government who have long ceased to care for their plight.

9.25 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The one thing that I can say about the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) is that, in his own way, he is quite engaging. His one characteristic in common, I think, with most hon. Members is that he does not take himself very seriously. If he is trying to argue that duties and responsibilities are never honoured unless there is a directly threatening sanction, he has a very miserable view of the human species which few of his hon. Friends would share.

I shall start with a complaint, although I do not want to make too much of it, and a rather remarkable circumstance. I picked up the Bill when it was first published and saw that it was presented—it says so on the back—by the Secretary of State for Social Security. The right hon. Gentleman is around the House. We saw him in the building and he even appeared briefly in the debate. However, he decided not to appear at the Dispatch Box, which I find a little puzzling.

One of my ingenious colleagues has suggested that the right hon. Gentleman is taking part in a job share: he is in ideological communion with the Secretary of State for Employment. They will do the job turn about, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, because they are intellectually indistinguishable. That is not entirely satisfactory. If this measure is important and a great Government showpiece it is somewhat discourteous to the House for the Secretary of State not to appear. I hope that I have put that in reasonable terms.

The Bill is depressing at a superficial level that is nevertheless worth mentioning. It is evidence of the depressing fashion for remote government. One can read the text with care and learn not a lot. Almost everything in the Bill is to be prescribed and will be done by regulations at a future and indeterminate date. Its

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

corpulent linguistic patterns are a delight to the insider. No doubt it is draftsman's padding of which he or she is proud, but it does not help the general public who may want to look at the measure. The simplest concept becomes complex. As something of a barrack-room lawyer in my own right, I ought to take great delight in, for example, clause 9(4), which deals with income and capital. It states:

"Circumstances may be prescribed in which—

(a) a person is treated as possessing capital or income which he does not possess;

(b) capital or income which a person does possess is to be disregarded;

(c) income is to be treated as capital;

(d) capital is to be treated as income."

There are acres, stricken page after stricken page, of similar verbiage.

We have been led through something of a moral maze today. I genuinely enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who pushed the boat out even further than he usually does in defining his distinctive position. I was intrigued to hear, from Conservative Members, Disraeli and Gramsci working in harness—even if it was in a good cause. It might be stretching it to say that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) entertained us for 24 minutes—she is not the most sympathetic figure on the Conservative Benches—but I look forward to the fulfilment of her very precise prediction that, under a Labour Government, she would find it necessary to knock down windmills. That will do very little for property values in Norfolk.

Then there was the Secretary of State. I had no idea that he had such a touching faith in—despite an incomplete knowledge of—the works of the late Lord Beveridge; I shall certainly remember that.

One stark fact, however, stands out from this interesting debate. The Bill is essentially about cutting public expenditure, reducing entitlement and undermining rights, and that is the essence of our objection to it. The core of the Bill is the cut from 12 to six months, about which the Secretary of State said very little. I can understand that—he wanted to concentrate on other matters, no doubt for good tactical reasons—but the cut is serious, in that it is unquestionably an attack on the contributory principle.

The Minister of State came to the Dispatch Box full of vim and vigour, but her intervention bore all the marks of the product of much time spent working on a bad case. It seemed that she had come up with something that she thought might just stand up, but it clearly did not.

People talk about the contract between Government and governed. We have heard a good deal about a speech that was made in Liverpool cathedral. Religious venues currently have a strange attraction for Conservative Front Benchers. The right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley)—not in his local cathedral, but addressing the Birmingham diocesan conference—recently discovered that there was a strong case for a minimum wage, in that he at least accepted that the principal cause—or, rather, economic cause; I must be precise—of social instability and marriage breakdown was the low wage paid to unskilled manual workers. That at least opened a chink for common sense.

If we believe, as these gentlemen do, in the contract between Government and governed, this exercise in Treasury expediency has a hollow, mean and unpleasant ring. Let me give an example of what I mean. One of the virtues seen by those with tidy minds in the Departments of Employment and of Social Security is harmonisation of benefit structures. When it comes to the treatment of those under 25 and over 25 respectively, their logic seems to suggest the importation of rules that are currently part of the income support structure to the new contributory jobseeker's allowance. If that had been applied to the coming year—it will come into effect in the year after that, but the pattern will be similar—a 24-year-old who had made exactly the same contributions as a man of 25 living at the other end of the street would receive £9.70 a week less than that man during the six-month period that is allowed.

I find that extraordinary. The Government's explanation is that someone of 24 earns less, expects less and therefore deserves less; but, as everyone knows, people of 24 eat as much and dress as expensively as older people, and the bills are every bit as big.

There is an interesting omission in the litany that is advanced to defend that proposal. We hear nothing about the "back to basics" philosophy. In the days before "back to basics" had a bad name, there was an additional argument: people would be persuaded, forced, encouraged, stimulated or motivated—all those nice euphemisms—to stay at home. That was the reason for such a substantial reduction.

I enjoyed the exchanges between the right hon. Member for St. Albans and the Select Committee on Social Security on 26 January, when the right hon. Gentleman was questioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy). On the split between 24 and 25-year-olds, he said that the rules were

"the same for everybody in the sense that everybody under 25 will be treated the same and everybody over 25 will be treated the same."

As an attempt at a reasonable defence, it is very sub Lewis Carroll but definitely in that league.

As I have explained, an income support rule on the 24 and 25-year-olds split has been imported into the contributory jobseeker's allowance. I must confess that I discovered that quite late in my exploration into these matters, but clause 1(4) contains an innocent looking provision on waiting days. A waiting-days concept will be introduced into the means-tested jobseeker's allowance. That concept was previously used only for unemployment benefit—the equivalent of the contributory jobseeker's allowance. I presume that the result of that will be that under part II of the Bill everyone who receives the contributory jobseeker's allowance will have to wait for a prescribed number of days before the benefit comes into effect; they will not receive it from the date of application, as they do now with the contributory benefit, which is being replaced.

It sounds complicated. It is a lovely proposal from the Treasury's point of view because it will save £40 million, as I heard in an answer to a parliamentary question. The proposal is the mirror image of what has been done with the 24-25 split. I deduce from that—I do not see any other deduction that I can make—that harmonisation is being pursued not in the interests of clients, justice or any other concept but simply to achieve the cheapest option. That

is harmonisation at the lowest common denominator. It tells us a great deal about the way in which the Government work and what they are trying to achieve.

We are told that the jobseeker's allowance will produce savings of £140 million in the first year and £270 million thereafter. It will be expensive to introduce. I say to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who waxed eloquent about the difficulty of getting a figure on the matter, that the financial memorandum printed at the front of the Bill states that the figure is £280 million over three years. We are told that there may even be 3,000, if not redundancies, at least redeployments in the Department of Employment. There is a great deal of disorganisation and a great deal of administrative expense. A fair degree of injustice and very minor savings will occur, even if one takes it from a Treasury viewpoint.

I ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to cast his mind back to the exchanges in the Select Committee on Social Security, this time with my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who asked who would pay. The right hon. Gentleman replied:

"It is savings, so no one will be paying it."

It is some sort of magic, painless, bloodless performance where savings are made for the Treasury and can be clawed out of the Budget, but no one pays. When rightly pressed by the chairman, the right hon. Gentleman was driven from that position. He said that

"Those who least the need help of the taxpayer"

will pay. We are talking about not a targeted benefit but a contributory benefit. It is not a relevant argument but it provides an interesting insight into the Secretary of State's view of the contributory principle that he pretends to defend. Almost 250,000 people will face the bill. They will be without the contributory jobseeker's allowance after six months at a cost of £180 million in 1997-98. Many will find themselves without an adult dependency increase. Again parliamentary answers tell us that no fewer than 5,000 will be forced on to means-tested benefits at any one time as a result. Spouses will have to give up work, very often to protect the husband's benefit. Of course, a large number of people will find that thrift has been punished because they have more than £3,000 in savings or perhaps £8,000 in savings, which takes them out of the jobseeker's system. After six months they will find that they are either bereft of benefit, forced on to means-tested benefits or left dependent on some other member of their family.

There is a massive inconsistency in the Government's position and it is illustrated by the facts. This is a serious argument. The Government rail, in my view quite rightly, about the difficulties of means-tested benefit. At the same time, they deliberately introduce measures that force many people on to means-tested benefits. That happens under other legislation as well as the Jobseekers Bill. For example, under the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994, 90,000 people in the first year and 190,000 in the second year will be forced on to means-tested benefits or on to the dole queues. The Government may make bigger and better savings, but there will be even greater misery, frustration and depression for the people who do not necessarily deserve that fate but who become the casualties of this sort of legislation. It will not do and the House should not vote for it.

There is another side to the argument. We are told that there is a stick and a carrot—that the Bill will help workseekers and encourage the work-shy. All that is contained in a rather nice little blue pamphlet. It is a sort of canvassers' aide memoire which was distributed at the Conservative party conference. I suspect that the phrase "encourage the work-shy" is a euphemism.

Some have argued that all this talk is simply gesture politics, posturing and playing to the Conservative party gallery. They say that it is tough talking but that nothing will really change. We will have to wait and see. I have said repeatedly that I fear that there is a strong hidden agenda. To be fair to Ministers, it is not hidden very thoroughly or consistently. A Conservative party brief produced for this debate includes a section entitled:

"Tougher sanctions on the Work-Shy."

It was interesting at Question Time this afternoon that, when faced with the neanderthal views—I use that phrase advisedly—of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), did not repudiate them but hurried to tell the hon. Gentleman that she hoped that the Jobseekers Bill would go at least some way towards allaying his fears. I do not want to live in a Britain where the fears, delusions and prejudices of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield are pandered to. In fairness to the Conservative party, I am sure that on the boat out I will find not only the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon but many others as well, and quite right, too.

There are some good things in the Bill. There is the back-to-work bonus, but it does not make the transition to work any easier. It rewards those who are successful in finding work. It reinforces success but does not help those who do not have the equipment to be successful. For many of the most vulnerable it will be a case of perhaps jam tomorrow, but it is much more likely that it will be jam never.

The national insurance holiday for those who have been unemployed for two years is a peelie-wally little attempt to deal with a real problem. It is worth about £6 a week. That is the incentive. Surely the Government who invented the national lottery can do better than that.

The jobfinder's grant, the extension of family credit on a test basis, and the job trial extension are not in the Bill and will have to be considered on another occasion.

I know that I am running into the Minister's time and I make no apology for that given what happened earlier in terms of the allocation of time and the agreement reached behind the Chair. I believe that I am within my rights.

One of the favourite examples of self-deception and delusion that afflicts Conservative Ministers is that they carry with them the support of a large number of outside bodies with expertise. However, even they cannot imagine that that is true in this instance.

Carers' organisations are very worried about the lack of a right to the jobseeker's allowance for those who cease caring, perhaps because of the death of the person cared for. There were sympathetic noises from the Secretary of State for Employment, but I assure him that we shall return to the issue in Committee. I hope that his sympathy will extend to practical help when we get there.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, the Disablement Income Group and the coalition of young people on social security have condemned the Bill. Almost everyone involved has said that it will not do and that it is inappropriate.

[Mr. Donald Dewar]

I remember the speeches, which have been referred to, made by the Secretary of State for Employment. I remember his speech about the need to restore deference in our society so that everyone knows his appointed place and keeps to it. However, the other side of deference is stigma. My worry is that, whatever the intention of some people in the Conservative party, the end product will be an extension of stigma, with all its disastrous consequences for the unfortunate in society. Those who have suffered misfortune, which may be economic or health related, will find themselves in the dock, stigmatised as economic failures and seen by many less tolerant people as social outcasts. That should not be the House's intention. The Bill is not merely about Treasury expedience; it is a social philosophy that still has about it the smell of less eligibility, which is why we shall vote against it tonight.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) made a valiant effort to sit on both sides of the fence. He wondered whether the Bill was tough or whether it was merely talk that would change nothing. He spoke of hidden agendas and ended with a fantastic peroration on the principles of stigma, which had nothing to do with the Bill. The mealy-mouthed concession in his closing remarks was that there were some good things in it, such as the back-to-work bonus.

I suppose that we should be grateful that the hon. Member for Garscadden was not quite as bizarre as the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who saw something sinister in the back-to-work bonus because it might save money in persuading people to go back to work.

Let us deal with the fundamental principles behind the Bill.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Evans: I shall not give way, as I have very little time.

The first principle of the Bill is to improve the operation of the job market, but we heard nothing about that from the Opposition parties. Secondly, when it came to improving the service to the unemployed by means of a uniform streamlined service, they grudgingly conceded that there might be something somewhere in the Bill that would achieve that end, but they based their miserable attack on the premise that anything involving streamlining was harmonisation on the worst possible basis.

The third principle is to improve value for the taxpayer, but that did not receive a single word of support from the Opposition, who ridiculed the considerable savings and treated them lightly. The smokescreen of an attack offered by the hon. Members for Peckham (Ms Harman) and for Garscadden was focused on the reduction of the period of receipt of contributory benefit from 12 to six months. It was spoken of as if it were a breach of faith or a breach of a private contract, which is absolutely absurd.

The contribution system of national insurance has always been a scheme regulated by statute, the terms of benefits of which have been altered over the years by successive Governments—including Labour Governments—as circumstances have changed. That must be so, because the basis of the scheme involves a number of parties: it involves those who draw from the system from a given moment in time and those who contribute to it for the greater part of their working lives. Parliament is the guarantor that the scheme is operated fairly. The National Insurance Act 1946 introduced a 30-week period plus additional days if the number of contributions was more than 26. The National Insurance Act 1966, introduced by the Labour Government, introduced the period of 12 months, with an earnings supplement for up to 156 days.

The most startling reason for the change, which the Opposition have completely ignored in this debate, is the fact that the national insurance scheme depends on the number of those paying in and the number of those paying out roughly balancing. We know full well that, with the increased proportion of the aged in the population, there must be an adjustment, which will be the matter of a separate Bill on pensions.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) said in an intervention that, somehow or other, there was a breach because nobody had been given notice of the change. This is not a proposal to come into force immediately, even if the House passes the Bill tomorrow. The proposal will not come into force until April 1996. Notice has been given. Nobody believes that even a private contractual arrangement cannot be altered when notice has been given. My hon. Friend the Minister of State rightly pointed out that the fundamental purpose of the national insurance scheme is that it is earmarked taxation. The promise is that the purposes for which the money is spent are those for which it is raised.

The savings involved are not trivial; this aspect of the Bill will save £180 million. The interesting challenge which, I have no doubt, will resound around the country over the next month and the next year, and when the next general election comes, is the question that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) wholly failed to answer: if the Government's proposals are wrong, will the Labour party promise to reverse them? It is a simple question. Either this is a matter of principle, which is how it has been argued, or it is a minor, contingent matter depending on transient economic circumstances. Labour will not answer; it does not wish to answer because it wants the bills never to come in and it wants the country never to be aware of the costs. The hon. Member for Peckham asked—

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I shall finish shortly. The hon. Member for Peckham asked where the winners, as opposed to the losers, would be under the Bill. I emphasise—[*Laughter.*] The cackling and the frivolity ignore the fact that the back-to-work bonus will benefit about 150,000 people. The employment-on-trial provisions will benefit about 200,000 people and the national insurance contributions holiday is expected to benefit about 120,000 people. The hon. Member for Garscadden mocked the fact that—

Mr. Dewar: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: I shall not give way because the Opposition pressurised me on time.

The hon. Member for Garscadden mocked and said that a £6 a week concession was meaningless to a small employer. That is not the case, as was shown by my hon. Friends the Members for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald). They have pointed out that there are very real incentives in the proposals. One should, perhaps, ask a further question, which was originally put by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough. How many of those who are seeking jobs—

Mr. Dewar: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I shall not give way. I have been pressurised on time unfairly and I propose to continue.

How many of those about whom there has been a great deal of talk have put their houses up on a bank guarantee? How many of the people of whom the Opposition spoke appreciate the difficulties of running small businesses, of maintaining solvency and of being able to provide the jobs that will promote prosperity?

The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) talked in the most classic, old-fashioned, socialist way about everyone having a right to work, and about everyone being entitled to a good place to live and a good education. All highly desirable, no doubt, but there was not the beginning of an understanding that such matters have to be paid for. There was not the beginning of an understanding that it is the members of the population who work who have to provide the earnings on which such standards can be maintained.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Evans: No. I have been cheated out of my starting time and I shall not give way.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that it is a tradition of the House that Ministers give way at least once in their speeches and that if—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It is not possible for the Chair to rule on a point of order when what the hon. Member has to say cannot be heard.

Mr. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would you confirm that it is a tradition of the House that Ministers give way at least once during their winding-up speeches and that, if they do not, it tempts the House to behave in an unruly way and to consider—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a not a point of order for the Chair. The House has become unruly in the past few minutes of this debate and it must now settle down.

Mr. Evans: It is also the tradition of the House that the Opposition give the Minister a chance to speak. I was short-circuited. The point which the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West was making totally failed to deal with the question that all those excellent matters of which he spoke have to be paid for.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) said that the only point of the Bill that she could see was that it would save money for the Treasury. That is not in itself a matter to be spoken of with such levity. May I give her—

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a genuine point of order.

Mr. Flynn: It is a genuine point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you remind the Minister, who is making his first, and possibly his last, Front-Bench speech—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a not a point of order at all.

Mr. Evans: I was about to assist the hon. Member for Rochdale on the specific matters which she put to me. On the question of training, 225,000 long-term adult places for training are expected next year and the Government have given their guarantee of providing training for all 16 to 17-year-olds. I give the assurance that the disabled will not fall—

Mr. Dewar *rose—*

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Evans: To expect me to give way in the last four minutes of my speech is unrealistic. I am trying to answer serious points made by the Liberal Democrats. I am amused that the Labour party apparently does not think that the Liberal Democrats are worth replying to. I am very interested to hear that, but never mind. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate at this late hour to intervene, but the House must now settle down and give the Minister the opportunity to reply.

Mr. Evans: I shall give way happily to the hon. Member for Peckham if she will answer the question which she has totally failed to answer at any stage of this debate: will she permit a future Labour Government, if ever such a Government should exist, to reduce and reverse what this Government are proposing in the Bill? That question will haunt her. Somehow, when it comes to a comment which the House may think would address the most material question, intervention comes there none.

My hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), for Scarborough and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) made the most important point that there must be a fair reciprocity of interests, a balance of interests between the taxpayer and the claimant. The talk by the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) of a climate of coercion and compulsion is exactly the kind of grotesque exaggeration which has so harmed British politics in recent years. *[Interruption.]* It goes down in history—rather like privatising the national health service—as a load of fabricated nonsense.

One of the fundamental mechanics of the Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North in particular explained and defended, is that there should be a jobseeker's agreement. The purpose of that agreement is to assist the jobseeker. It is based on the present back-to-work plan. It is designed to spell out and set out the steps that the jobseeker will take, to which he agrees.

[Mr. Evans]

It is right that the individual jobseeker should be invited not only to discuss those terms with the person at the employment office but to agree them.

I am very concerned about the attack on the next stage of the mechanics of the Bill—the question of the direction. I can give the assurance that the direction will be subject to the ordinary process of adjudication, so the more fanciful fears expressed by some Opposition Members are wholly without foundation. The point is that a direction and some degree of compulsion are necessary to strike a fair balance between the taxpayer and the claimants. The work-shy are an unknown quantity, but they are thought to be one in six claimants.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 269.

Division No. 32] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cllthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'hire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killeddar, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shephard, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry

Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

JOBSEEKERS BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Jobseekers Bill it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State—

(a) for making payments by way of the jobseeker's allowance and the back to work bonus;

(b) for making grants in connection with resettlement places;

(c) in respect of any other expenditure incurred by him under or by virtue of the Act;

(2) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided; and

(3) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of—

(a) sums estimated by the Secretary of State to balance payments made by him by way of contribution-based jobseeker's allowance;

(b) sums estimated by the Secretary of State to balance sums recovered by him in connection with payments made by way of income-based jobseeker's allowance;

(c) sums recovered by the Secretary of State by way of repayment of grants for resettlement places—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Disabled People

10.24 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Six and a half million disabled persons and their carers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are looking to us to introduce legislation that will outlaw the discrimination that they have suffered for far too long—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quietly and will those remaining please stay in their seats?

Mr. Clarke: I am privileged to present a petition that has been signed by 32,000 people, and the number is still growing. It demands that the House introduces positive measures to remove discrimination—measures that will be seen as tangible, enforceable and fair. In so doing, we will restore the confidence that disabled people once had in the House. With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be delighted to present that petition, which reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of Residents from throughout Great Britain

Sheweth.

That the overwhelming support for a Disabled Persons' Civil Bill in both Houses of Parliament should lead to urgent and meaningful legislation in this session.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Prime Minister and his Government not to impede a measure which has already been implemented in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray &tc.

To lie upon the Table.

Social Fund

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10.27 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Hon. Members are not leaving, are they?—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so quietly?

Mr. Barron: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I applied to the Speaker's Office to bring up the treatment of one of my constituents, Mr. Michael Pitson, and the local social fund and how it operates within the Rotherham area.

It is one of Parliament's great strengths that we are able to use the Adjournment procedure to highlight individual cases and I hope that that never stops. We represent millions of people and we should be able to raise individual cases here when we believe that an injustice has been done.

Mr. Michael Pitson is a married man with two young children who lives in Maltby—a village in my constituency. He worked at Silverwood colliery in October 1992, when the President of the Board of Trade made an announcement about the future of the British coal industry. It is ironic that Silverwood colliery was not on the original hit list of coal mines at that time, although it subsequently closed. Like many others, Mr. Pitson had joined the coal industry thinking that he had a secure future. That was not to be.

Following the closure of Silverwood colliery, Mr. Pitson decided to change his career and applied to train as a nurse in the mental health field. He passed the entrance examination in December 1992 to commence a three-year course leading to a higher national diploma in nursing—mental health branch. Mr. Pitson wrote to many colleges and, after an interview, was accepted at Humberside college of health.

Mr. Pitson came to my constituency surgery last April and explained in detail his problems finding accommodation for himself and his family. Initially, I asked him to put the matter in writing as I wanted to consider his problem. He wrote to me and said:

"On being accepted by Humberside College of Health I went to the council office in Hull to inquire about a council house in or near the Hull area. The spokesperson for the council told me that because I would have student status I was not eligible for a council house in the Hull area.

After this I went to Grimsby council to apply for a house on that side of the Humber and travel to the hospital over the bridge. No luck here! To be eligible for a council house in Grimsby you had to have lived in Grimsby for one year or more.

Having looked at the council map I noticed two councils that border the Hull area. Holderness is only two miles from De La Pole Hospital"—

where Mr. Pitson had been accepted to take a course.

"They told me that if the course had been inside their border, they would have offered me and my family a council house but because it was two miles outside their area, they said, 'Sorry can't help'.

The other bordering council was Beverley, who said if I wish to return to Beverley and were of pensionable age, no problem, but at a mere 26 and with a family they said, 'Sorry, nothing to offer'.

So having tried all the councils I approached several private rental agencies. All had the same answers to my inquiries—as I was only a student nurse and currently unemployed they were unwilling to take me on their books. I have also had my name on the home swap list, but to the present I have had no inquiries."

Mr. Pitson wrote to the Department of the Environment and the Prime Minister. He received a letter from the Government Office for Yorkshire and Humberside telling him about the "Homeswap" scheme and giving him a list of other agencies to which he could talk. At the beginning of July, he thought that he had made a breakthrough. He wrote to me and said:

"I am writing to thank you for all your help in trying to find me and my family a home in Hull, so I can take up my nursing course. But like me your efforts seem to be hitting a brick wall.

So as a last effort before giving up I tried ringing around all the estate agents in the Hull area. Then to my surprise I came across an estate agent who not only rented the type of home I was looking for but they were also willing to accept me. The houses they were offering all had a monthly rent of £350. As I am eligible for rent rebate I approached Hull council who said once I had moved in, there would be no problem with claiming housing benefit to the full amount. Hooray, victory at last!"

Mr. Pitson went on:

"Not so, the estate agent said to secure any property they would need 1 month's rent plus £100 administration fee before I could move in. So not giving up I went back to the Social Security office to see if I could have the first month's rent in advance. They said 'No', I was not eligible for housing benefit until I had moved in, and I could not move in because I have not got the £450 needed. So after getting so close the brick wall strikes again."

I then wrote a letter to the Benefits Agency in July. I said:

"I have been corresponding on Mr. Pitson's behalf about the possibility of him getting housing on Humberside where he had been offered a course in a higher education diploma in nursing starting in March of next year. I have enclosed a copy of a recent letter from the college. I also enclose for your information a copy of a letter I received a few weeks ago from Mr. Pitson saying that our attempts over the last few months to find housing for him and his family on Humberside had shown some fruit, but were eventually dashed because of the need to have a month's rent paid in advance.

I would like to know if there is any possibility of Mr. Pitson being assisted in moving house and if a payment for rent in advance could be secured from Social Security.

Throughout the months that I have been dealing with Michael Pitson, he has shown nothing but a determination to get on in his life both for his own sake and that of his family. It appears that he now has a good opportunity to move into higher education and at some stage, hopefully in the not too distant future, to move off benefit dependency. I would hope that all people concerned will assist in any way that they can to make this happen."

The reply from the local benefits agency stated that it had no record of a budget loan claim, but that he had been sent the requisite forms. The letter also stated:

"A claim for rent in advance is generally considered to be of medium priority. At present we are only able to make loans of high priority items. However until we know the full circumstances we are unable to consider whether in Mr. Pitson's case the loan could be considered as high priority."

His application for a loan was made in August for advance rent and a bond and it was subsequently rejected.

Mr. Pitson waited for my return from holiday before asking me about what to do next. Unfortunately, the wait meant that he was outside the 28 days allowed for appeal. I wrote to the local office and to their credit the staff there accepted the reason for Mr. Pitson's delay and allowed

[Mr. Barron]

the appeal to go ahead. Mr. Pitson was interviewed again on 23 September and in his review the report officer stated:

"Directive 8 is satisfied for a loan but a bond is excluded under Direction 12/0, and rent in advance is of insufficient priority . . . for a loan to be offered. Also, by refusing the bond there is no need of the rent in advance. Therefore, it is a nil award."

That is typical civil service speak. He is told that because he could not have a bond anyway, there was no sense in offering the loan. I told Mr. Pitson that if he could get the rent in advance I would write to the person with the house and try to get him to accept that Mr. Pitson was a responsible person and should not need a bond. The report also stated:

"the district loans budget could only constantly sustain payments for essential household items as the budget is under pressure due to the number of claims. The state of the district budget is 47.39 per cent. remaining for 51.78 per cent. of the financial year."

An appeal was lodged against that decision and it was sent for independent review. The review agreed that the social fund officer had made the right decision and that it should stand. It appears that the directions that cover only three items under the discretionary directive fund exclude everything but a loan—if it has the right priority. Direction 29 states that a community care grant cannot be made for housing costs other than minor repairs.

Because Mr. Pitson had applied for one month's rent and bond money to help him rent a private home for himself and his family, it was considered that the provisions of direction 29 prevented an award of a community care grant. Direction 12 states that a budgeting loan may not be awarded in respect of rent in advance where the landlord is not a local authority. The officer stated:

"I consider that the provisions of Direction 12 prevent an award by way of a budget loan for the bond money. Direction 23 states that a crisis loan may not be awarded in respect of an advance . . . where the landlord is not the local authority."

The officer went on to consider the provision of direction 23 in relation to an award for a crisis loan, which again was not for this purpose. He stated:

"There are two types of social fund loan, a crisis loan and a budgeting loan. I do not consider that Mr. Pitson qualifies for a crisis loan as the expense must be to assist Mr. Pitson in an emergency or a consequence of a disaster. Budgeting loans are intended to help the applicant."

One of the criteria is that applicants must be in receipt of income support for 26 weeks. Mr. Pitson fulfilled that criterion, and consequently could have received a budget loan; but he was not considered to be a sufficiently high priority.

The inspector stated:

"To decide the priority of this application I have in particular considered the nature, extent and urgency of the need. I have also considered the guidance on priority issued by the Area SFO"—

the area social fund officer—

"and the state of the district loans budget.

In his guidance dated the 1 April 1994, the Area SFO said that the district loans budget could only consistently sustain applications considered to be of a high priority."

The inspector then mentioned percentages.

I looked at the guidelines relating to discretionary social fund criteria for community care grant, crisis loans and budget loans. The area SFO, who is normally the manager of the local benefits agency, issues guidance each year for SFOs who administer the fund at the desk, as it were. The area SFO tells SFOs:

"You are reminded that while Section 140(5) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 requires you to take account of this guidance it is only one of the factors to be considered by you in reaching a decision.

Whilst SFOs are required to have regard to the following guidance, it is not binding on them and is only one of the factors which they should consider in reaching their decision. It cannot be expected to cover every situation that will arise in deciding the overall priority of an application. SFOs must, using their discretion, consider every application on its merits, and have particular regard to the individual circumstances of the application, and the need for the item or service. SFOs should consider raising the level of priority where needs of the applicant and the circumstances warrant it."

That clearly was not done in this case.

The guidance goes on to discuss crisis loans. Of course, the SFOs must grant such loans only when they deem the applicant to be experiencing a crisis.

In April last year, the area social fund officer—the district manager of the scheme—signed guidance on priority levels. That was a clear recognition of the position, and effectively an instruction to local social fund officers. The guidance that he signed stated:

"I consider that currently, for grants, payment of high priorities can be consistently sustained from the budget without exceeding it."

If that was the guidance at the beginning of the financial year when the budget was known, what happens to medium and low-priority applications? Clearly, they fail. It is a mockery for the Government to lay down guidelines for high, medium and low priorities if the budget does not meet medium and low priorities, and as a consequence any application in those categories fails.

I asked Rotherham metropolitan borough council's social policy unit how many people in the borough were living below the poverty line and might need assistance from the discretionary social fund. The unit wrote to me as follows:

"The most recent statistics available (November 1994) show that a total of 38,370 people are currently in receipt of Income Support in the Rother and Dearne area. The comparative figure for the same month in 1993 shows a total of 37,165—indicating an upward trend of over 3 per cent. This figure, of course, only shows the number of Income Support 'cases' and therefore does not cover the total number of people in each case who are living at this level (ie partner of Income Support claimants, children etc). It is also very difficult to ascertain the total number of people living below the poverty line as not everyone claims their entitlement to Income Support and are, therefore, not shown in the statistics above (for example pensioners who only live on their retirement pension)."

The unit also supplied me with information on the number of successful applications made to the fund between April and November last year. In August, when Mr. Pitson applied, 1,998 applications were made. August was the only month between April and November when the figure fell below 2,000. Such a figure is clearly not adequate for the needs of the district.

Figures calculated from the 1991 census show how Rotherham has high levels of deprivation in many economic sectors. The social policy unit states that unemployment is defined more widely in the census than in the official Department of Employment figures and that it includes all people seeking work, whether registered or not.

Unemployment in Rotherham has increased since April 1991, in particular as a result of pit closures and restructuring in the iron and steel industries. The national

England and Wales unemployment figure was 9.17 per cent. The shaded areas on the map that I hold in front of me shows the communities with more than 18 per cent. unemployment in the borough. Average unemployment in the borough in 1991 was 11.9 per cent. Maltby, the village in which my constituent lives, is in one of the shaded areas and suffers from that high unemployment.

The social policy unit's study also showed that, out of 56,802 children in the district, 12,151 were living in non-earning households. It said:

"The national average is 17.35 per cent, the shaded areas in the map"—

which include Maltby—

"indicate the enumeration districts in which the percentage of children in non-earning households is at least 34.7 per cent. of children in all households."

That is nearly twice the national average. Children living in and around the village are disadvantaged compared with other people.

The Government have a duty to assist people like Michael Pitson to get on in life and to make a career change from an industry that will not have the sort of jobs that it had in the past. His treatment at the hands of many institutions, controlled directly and indirectly from central Government, was the opposite of the assistance that Michael Pitson should have had. We have debated the Second Reading of the Jobseekers Bill. Michael Pitson applied for an allowance to seek work and it failed. He was not of a high enough priority. He and his family should have been of a high enough priority. He said that he wanted

"to move out of an area like mine with such high levels of deprivation and unemployment, to have this career change and to get back into average work again."

Places like Rotherham, which suffer this level of deprivation, should have social funds that are adequate and will meet not just high priorities, in terms of their discretion, but medium and low priorities. I urge the Minister to look at the operation of the social fund in Rotherham to ensure that it adequately meets the needs of people so that people like Michael Pitson and his family can receive the assistance that they should receive from the Government.

10.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has presented classically a constituent case. I agree that it is a matter of great importance to the House that Members of Parliament should have the opportunity to pursue individual cases. He has developed his argument to solve the issue of the social fund in the Rotherham region.

I begin by dealing briefly with Mr. Pitson's case. It is important that we should understand precisely what lessons can be learnt from this matter. The hon. Member for Rother Valley, with the usual courtesy, approached my officials and various inquiries and discussions have taken place behind the scenes. I am happy to be able to tell the House that it looks as though a loan will be made from an access fund by the regional health authority, which will meet the initial housing cost that Mr. Pitson needs. That is an important matter and it was a surprise to the hon. Gentleman and myself as a letter was posted at the end of last week over the holiday period.

Mr. Barron: Does the Minister accept that if I had not telephoned the people at the college early last week to tell them about this Adjournment debate, they would not have known about Mr. Pitson's housing problem and he would not have known that the college had a fund—even the college was surprised—to help people with families? We are still left with the problem that Mr. Pitson does not have a home to move into. I hope that the Minister will address that.

Mr. Evans: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first point is yes. The hon. Gentleman has pursued his constituent's interests with energy and I understand that it is as a result of his approach to the relevant college that an access fund loan is now available.

There is still the problem of finding private rented accommodation, but it looks as if the problem of the initial cost of a fee plus some form of rent in advance can be met, as it is intended that it should be by the system, through an access fund loan.

Happily, the purpose of all this is to enable Mr. Pitson to attend a three-year full-time nursing course at Humberside college, beginning in April this year. The hon. Gentleman might like to consider with his constituent, who has been awarded a bursary at a higher level than the present income support level, whether he is entitled to any of the in-work benefits such as housing benefit or possibly family credit. We do not have enough information and a proper application must be made. It may be that more can be done.

Let us suppose that an access fund loan had not been available. It does not necessarily follow that nothing could have been done for Mr. Pitson. At the discretion of a local authority, if it deems it reasonable, housing benefit may be payable on two separate dwellings where one of the partners is away on a training course.

I must be careful about my comments on the operation of the social fund as it applied to Mr. Pitson because, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, the decision-making and the review of decision-making is an independent process. I endorse entirely the account of the facts given by the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps I can explain what appears to have happened. The first decision of the social fund officer on 15 August 1994 was that a community care grant was not possible because direction 4 was not satisfied. The second decision was that a budgeting loan for a rent bond, deposit or administrative fee—however it is dressed up by the prospective landlord—was refused as that is a specifically excluded item under direction 12(O). As the hon. Gentleman said, the request for rent in advance was refused on priority grounds. As the hon. Gentleman explained, the social fund inspector upheld that subsequently.

Since it is an independent process I cannot comment on the particular case. However, perhaps I can explain to the hon. Gentleman and the House the Government's thinking behind the scheme and the directions as they are drawn. The issue of deposits and whether there should be provision for them is a very old and difficult one. Direction 12(O) came into being deliberately to exclude them because the previous scheme had escalated dramatically. Between 1981 and 1986 the sums involved increased from £18,000 to £3 million as the number of cases increased from 750 to 33,000. In 1987-88 the sums involved had reached £10 million.

[Mr. Evans]

There is no easy answer to the problem. If one does not pay, the poor applicant who wants the home cannot jump the hurdle. If one does pay, human nature is such that every private landlord in every circumstance will demand such a deposit. *[Interruption.]* The difficulty is that if a contract is to be entered into freely it is a matter of bargain between the parties. If one of the parties is paid a blank cheque by the taxpayer, there is an inevitable tendency for the other to take advantage of it.

The Department of the Environment is examining a pilot scheme to help with deposits run in conjunction with the Notting Hill housing trust. The Government's general thinking on this matter is that direction 12(O) represents a sensible policy.

The case for rent in advance failed on grounds of low priority. I must say that I find it difficult to comment on this aspect. The hon. Gentleman explained the facts of his constituent's case—I have no doubt that the House was sympathetic to Mr. Pitson—but we do not know about any other claims that were made or the context in which the priority was established.

In 1993-94, the social fund made 21,600 rent-in-advance loans worth nearly £3 million. I heard what the hon. Gentleman told the House about the sums available under the fund and how the fund operates in his constituency. I should be able to comfort him to the extent that the local guidance to which he referred as an instruction is not, in fact, an instruction.

The Government's view of the social fund is that it is generally working well, focusing resources on those most in need of help and making the most effective use of the available resources to help large numbers of people. Since the scheme began, nearly 1.7 million non-repayable grants have been awarded and more than 8.5 million interest-free loans. Last year, the fund helped 5 per cent. more people than in the financial year ending in 1993. Our commitment to this important aspect of provision is clear. We have given more money to the fund every year and that was also the case in 1994-95, even with fierce competition for public funds.

The social fund's gross budget now stands at more than £50 million higher than two years ago. As recently as November, the loans budget was increased by £13 million, a 5 per cent. increase on the allocation announced at the beginning of this financial year. I should explain that Rother Valley had its portion of that. It was made possible by the improved performance of the Benefits Agency in recovering loan repayments, in part due to the new computer system introduced last year. Recycling money in the form of recoverable loans is a successful and effective way to use public funds as it increases the amount of help available. The proportion recovered is substantial and the money can be used again and again.

The Government will continue to keep the operation of the fund under close scrutiny and we shall make improvements to ensure that the considerable help provided by the social fund goes to our most vulnerable citizens.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL *[Lords]*

Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.

Read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credits Guarantee Department

1. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firms in Leeds have benefited from ECGD funds in the last 12 months.

The Minister for Export Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): ECGD has supported one case in the last 12 months involving a firm based in Leeds.

Mr. Battle: Will not the future prospects for exporting from Leeds and other areas be jeopardised by the Department's proposals to fragment the regional DTI teams into Business Links, effectively reducing export advice and back-up? As the Barnsley Business Links already appears to be in financial difficulties and is laying off staff, will not the Department's proposals to strip down the regional DTI offices take effect at the price of exports and local jobs?

Mr. Needham: To ask a question on the Order Paper about ECGD and export insurance in Leeds and then follow it up by talking about Business Links shows the hon. Gentleman's lack of understanding and knowledge about exports. What the Government are offering through Business Links throughout the country is a service to exporters that will match anything offered by any of our competitors anywhere in the world. If the hon. Gentleman would come with me some day to see some of the Business Links he might have more idea of what he is talking about.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that manufacturing companies in Leeds and in Yorkshire as a whole are more than playing their part in Britain's current superb exporting performance? ECGD funding can be helpful, but is not the most crucial factor in winning markets overseas that British companies should maximise their productivity and competitiveness, and that the British Government should not foist unnecessary rules and costs on to those companies? That is why we must stay well clear of the social chapter.

Mr. Needham: Leeds is one of the centres of British manufacturing excellence and has been for a century or more. Leeds, with our other great cities, is leading a remarkable export success story. Our manufacturing record is now better than that of France, Japan or Germany. Perhaps Opposition Members might like to congratulate us on that.

Mr. Clapham: Has the sale of ECGD business to NCM encouraged more firms to invest in unstable areas of the world such as the former Soviet Union?

Mr. Needham: NCM is a short-term reinsurance cover for business, and has nothing to do with companies investing either in the former Soviet Union or anywhere else. Once again, the ignorance of Opposition Members is palpable to all.

Inward Investment (Lancashire)

2. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he is pursuing to increase inward investment into Lancashire.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy (Mr. Charles Wardle): The Department continues to work with all local partners, including Inward, the regional development organisation, encouraging them to develop sites and premises of the quality and variety that will attract foreign-owned companies in the future.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Will he take all the steps that he can to ensure that companies are told about the excellent opportunities that exist based on the high-tech abilities of the work force in the Fylde coast area of Lancashire, including Blackpool, based on the success of companies such as British Aerospace, ICI, British Nuclear Fuels and many others in the area and based on the computer skills of the civil servants in the local Information Technology Services Agency? Will he continue, with his colleagues, to work with the Fylde Partnership and other organisations doing their best to bring inward investment to my constituency and the surrounding area?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise those points. He will know that the Fylde Partnership is doing a great deal to attract new technology to the area. The Government office is of course in regular contact. I know that my hon. Friend has invited the regional director to visit him in Blackpool for discussions, and I hope that he will encourage Blackpool borough council to join Inward. By way of background, he might like to know that the Invest in Britain bureau lists 30 projects, four of which are in Lancashire, with 2,100 jobs in the north-west. With my hon. Friend's help, no doubt more emphasis will be placed on Blackpool.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that, although Burnley is being assisted by the KONVER programme, many parts of Lancashire—high-technology, high-skilled areas—are losing jobs as a result of the defence reductions? We need to project Lancashire as a highly skilled area and attract the right type of investment, using those skills to create jobs for the future.

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman will know that the provisional list of areas eligible for KONVER 2 in

Lancashire includes Burnley, Preston, Pendle and Fylde, but there is scope for additional areas to be nominated by 1 March. Representations will be considered carefully.

Mr. Mans: In connection with inward investment into Lancashire, when do the Government propose to rejoin the future large aircraft consortium? When is it likely that we will start to contribute money to that project, bearing in mind its importance to Lancashire and the north-west generally?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend may be aware that we recently announced our intention to rejoin the consortium.

Regional Selective Assistance

3. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many subsidiary companies with headquarters in the United States have received regional selective assistance since June 1979; and how many have since ceased operation in the United Kingdom.

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): Since June 1979, 644 United States-owned subsidiary companies have received offers of regional selective assistance in Great Britain in relation to more than 900 projects. Of these, 167 projects did not proceed and 49 were not fully completed.

Mr. Gunnell: I thank the Minister for that information. I recognise that successful inward investment owes much to regional selective assistance and to the work of regional development organisations and the support of local authorities, but has the Minister analysed why some projects were not completed and others were unsuccessful? Has he made any comparison between our figures for incomplete investments and the corresponding figures for failures in continental Europe? If his theories about the social chapter are to be supported, one must show that on the continent there is a greater proportion of failures than in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: The facts speak for themselves. No less than 43 per cent. of all United States investment in the European Union has been made in the United Kingdom. That investment, which has mainly been made with the aid of regional selective assistance, has led to the creation of 100,000 extra jobs since 1979 and has safeguarded 60,000 jobs. That is a record of considerable success. The hon. Gentleman has a long record of working constructively on inward construction projects. I pay tribute to him because such work is very much a partnership. He will recognise that a great deal of work is going on. In particular, we place emphasis on the need for proper aftercare of companies that have made an investment. We need to work closely with them, monitor their experience and see whether we can improve the quality of our services. We also need to use them as ambassadors for other sources of inward investment for the future.

Mr. Brooke: Would my right hon. Friend—what a pleasure it is to call him that—care to take this opportunity to testify to the enormous contribution in terms of economic activity, competition and transfer of technology made by American investment into Britain not only in the past 15 years but in the past 100 years?

Mr. Eggar: I thank my right hon. Friend for his first remarks. Britain's commitment to inward investment, as he rightly says, goes back many decades. It is extremely important to the economic success of the United Kingdom. The single most important factor is that an inward-investing company, whether it be American, Japanese, Korean or whatever, knows that once it has invested in the United Kingdom it will be treated by the British Government as a UK company and will be fully supported by us. There is no doubt that the rejuvenation in the past decade or so, particularly in the manufacturing sector, has largely been due to our success in attracting inward investment from established investors and from new ones.

Mr. Bell: Since it is still the season of good will, may I add the Opposition's congratulations on the right hon. Gentleman's elevation to the Privy Council? Will he confirm that the selective regional assistance packages that we offer are no greater than those offered by our European competitors through grants, financial incentives and soft loans? May I also congratulate the President of the Board of Trade on having seen off the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who did not believe in selective regional assistance and thought that it distorted the free market? Finally, can the Minister now reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) and congratulate local authorities, which play their full part, on putting together selective regional assistance packages?

Mr. Eggar: I welcome the peace and good will that appears to have broken out at this Question Time. I hope that it will be sustained during the coming months. Yes, I willingly pay tribute to the many local authorities that have taken a very constructive attitude to attracting inward investment, especially in the past few years. I also pay tribute to the training and enterprise councils, which have also come to the party, and to the private sector, which has helped. It is a co-operative partnership, which is working increasingly well and being increasingly successful.

Overseas Customers (Education)

4. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what surveys he has conducted into the educational background of overseas customers of British manufactured goods and services; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): We have not conducted any such surveys, but we are keen that overseas business men should develop a network of relations with the United Kingdom through education and training opportunities.

Mr. Fabricant: Before I came to this place, was I the only exporter to find that many customers had been educated and trained in the United Kingdom? Does my hon. Friend agree that the provision of education and training for overseas visitors in the United Kingdom, by organisations such as the British Council and others, is not charity but an investment for British trade and industry?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is exactly right and that is precisely why the Department of Trade and Industry

has a series of programmes with the British Council and the Foreign Office to encourage people to come to this country for education and training. I urge British companies to do more, so that they assist the familiarisation process with British goods, which will eventually lead to further export opportunities.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If that is now so, what have the Government to say about the Foreign Office decision in the early 1980s to cut the very grants that are used to fund the education of overseas students coming to the United Kingdom? In so far as many Opposition Members thoroughly agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) on that issue, will the Government review that decision? Wherever one goes abroad, people in our overseas embassies repeatedly tell us that the restoration of those grants is critical to trade with the United Kingdom.

Mr. Taylor: The simple answer is that the number of overseas students in British universities and colleges of higher education is higher than it was when the grant changes were made. The reason for that is that the value to other people of the good education that they can get in this country is self-evident and it is not merely put down to cost.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the quality of British education and its representation around the world that sells it, not subsidies? What is his Department doing to ensure that British educational exports, of both products and services, receive the full backing that they need through our embassy and consulate network?

Mr. Taylor: We have established a whole network of overseas technical advisers in embassies and they are doing an excellent job, especially in the technical field, in ensuring that the advantages of British education and products are known. The export value of educational services is about £4 billion a year, which shows how important and successful that sector is to British performance overall.

EU Funding

5. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will outline progress towards the implementation of United Kingdom objective 1 funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In the six months since the adoption of new six-year programmes for the three UK objective 1 areas, grants of nearly £200 million have been approved to more than 1,150 projects.

Mr. Kennedy: I thank the Minister for that reply. Given the welcome nature of the structural funding available to the three areas in question, including the Scottish highlands and islands, does he agree that one of the implementation difficulties that seems to arise is that smaller business people rarely have the back-up required to make an application? They do not have the complex range and detail of professional services that are required, so the bulk of the funding understandably goes to local authorities, enterprise companies and so on, which have greater expertise at their disposal. Will the Minister and his officials see whether more help can be given specifically to smaller business people so that they can get as much advantage from the funds as the bigger concerns?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman highlighted the progress in his constituency as part of the highlands and islands objective 1 grant. I understand that £16 million of objective 1 grants have been approved for 208 projects. He will know from his constituency that some of them are fairly small sums, but he makes a perfectly valid point, which should be considered by the monitoring committees. If he approaches the appropriate Government office, I am sure that it will take the point on board and that the monitoring committees will want to think about it.

Mr. Salmond: Has the Minister analysed how the cuts in local authority finance in Scotland will impact on the ability of the highlands and islands and the north-east of Scotland to take advantage of objective 1 and objective 5b status? Would not it be ironic, if somewhat familiar, if benefits from Europe were undermined by the policies of the London Government?

Mr. Wardle: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman takes such a sour approach to the good news for Scotland. I hope that he bears in mind the fact that the six-year allocation of structural funds from 1994 to 1999 for the highlands and islands will amount to £263 million. That must be good news.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Minister recognise, however, that the squeeze on local authority spending may lead to an inability to take up European funds, particularly given the need for matching grants?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Lady will want to bear it in mind that the keynote for regional policy should be value for money. In that context, local authorities could do a great deal more.

Tractor Plant (Basildon)

6. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the recent visit of the Minister of State to the tractor plant at Basildon.

Mr. Eggar: I visited the New Holland Ford facility, the largest agricultural equipment plant in the UK, last October. In addition to a tour of the plant, I had a very useful meeting with senior management from New Holland Ford and its parent company, Fiat.

Mr. Amess: Following my right hon. Friend's visit to Basildon, will he join me in congratulating the work force and management of the Fiat tractor plant on their success in increasing sales of their products throughout the United Kingdom? Following his discussions, does he agree that the pay and employment opportunities of the work force would have been adversely affected if our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had not achieved the opt-out provisions in the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Eggar: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the plant's management and work force. It has been a major success story. Production is up by some 30 per cent. on three years ago, despite the fact that the overall market has fallen by some 26 per cent. in the same period.

[Interruption.] The Opposition seem to find it funny that my hon. Friend jokes at their expense because of their stance on the social chapter. Let me spell it out to them—

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the Minister that we are not in debate. The question needs answering.

Mr. Eggar: May I emphasise to my hon. Friend, Madam Speaker, the message that we both received from the work force? It was that it is working on average 55 to 65 hours a week, which involves about 20 hours' overtime. The work force does that voluntarily and I am sure that my hon. Friend will not miss the opportunity to make it clear to these people that, if the Labour party were in power, they could not work that amount of overtime but would be limited to 48 hours a week.

Mr. Purchase: Does the Minister accept that it is illegal for horses to work more than eight hours a day? Although he claims that it is a great thing for people to work 60 hours a week, does he not accept that high skills and good investment in our plant represent a far better way to proceed in the last part of the 20th century and into the 21st century than keeping people at work for 60 hours a week?

Mr. Eggar: I see: so the new model Labour party will dictate to individual workers exactly how many hours they should work.

Association of South-East Asian Nations

7. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to foster British trade with ASEAN countries.

Mr. Needham: My Department now has in place a wide range of measures to promote trade with the ASEAN countries, including the appointment of six export promoters, who work with our embassies and the Department to provide first-hand advice and assistance to British companies exporting to ASEAN.

Mr. Lidington: I am encouraged by that answer. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very important to encourage not just established major British exporters, but small and medium-sized companies, which might feel daunted at the prospect of exporting to south-east Asia, to take advantage of those attractive markets?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is right. For that reason, we are concentrating our efforts on small and medium-sized companies securing orders from ASEAN through the Business Links, the appointment of regional export advisers throughout the country, the provision of export promoters and the large number of additional missions that we are organising. The success of that policy is shown by the fact that, so far this year, our exports to ASEAN countries are up 26 per cent. and their exports to us, one of the most dynamic regions of the world, are up by 5.6 per cent.

Mr. Beggs: What progress are Northern Ireland companies making in developing exports to ASEAN? When might we expect investment to begin from the Investment Forum, which was successfully initiated in Belfast by the Prime Minister?

Mr. Needham: The last part of the hon. Gentleman's question is one for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I can reassure him and the people of Ulster that companies from Northern Ireland are already enormously successful in ASEAN. For example Mivan is building 3,000 apartments in Thailand; Mackies of Belfast, which was almost on its back three years ago, is now successfully exporting to Indonesia and Malaysia; Shorts has won many orders in that part of the world; and Randox Laboratories has also been successful in the region.

I am sure that the advent of peace has given the business spirit of the people of Ulster an uplift. I have no doubt that those business people will become ever more successful in south-east Asia. I shall do my best to take those people with me whenever I go to that region.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the growth of our exports to ASEAN is due in part to the buoyancy of the ASEAN economies? Does he further agree that that buoyancy exists because those economies are deregulated and do not suffer from the obligations and restrictions that the Labour party would impose on the British economy?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is right that ASEAN represents the most successful, most buoyant and fastest-growing economies in the world because they are capitalist to the core. They know what is important in trying to help the poorest of their people to get work and to improve their living standards. It would be a great help to British businesses if many more Opposition Members went to those countries to see those economies for themselves.

Building Societies Merger

8. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive the report of the Director General of Fair Trading into the proposed merger of the Halifax and the Leeds Permanent building societies.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Jonathan Evans): My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 21 December that he had decided not to refer the proposed merger of the Halifax and Leeds Permanent building societies to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. That decision was in accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mrs. Mahon: The Minister will be aware that the Halifax employs more than 3,000 people in my constituency and that the Leeds Permanent employs more than 1,000 people in Leeds. What steps will he take to ensure that promises to myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) that those jobs would be retained are kept? Will he further ensure that the strength of the proposed merger will not in any way disadvantage customers?

Mr. Evans: I think that the hon. Lady knows that the making of decisions about employment is a commercial matter, but that the parties have given reassurances—as she said—that any reductions necessary will be brought about only through voluntary redundancy and natural wastage.

However, I remind the hon. Lady that the decision that is made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade relates merely to those factors concern[illegible].g

this matter which relate to the Fair Trading Act 1973. The decision on merger is a matter for the members of the building societies themselves. The hon. Lady also knows that, according to the Building Societies Act 1986, the Building Societies Commission will ensure that all the requisite information is given to members when the voting process is undertaken, and that, in the case of investing members, the decision must be passed by a majority of 75 per cent. of the people who participate.

Sir Donald Thompson: I thank my hon. Friend for those answers. Does he agree with me that the people of Yorkshire welcome the building of a huge financial institution by the merging of the Halifax and Leeds Permanent building societies, which will be able to compete, not only in the United Kingdom but throughout Europe?

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. I am aware that the Director General of Fair Trading has received several representations in the period since the merger was announced, many of which were along the lines that have been outlined by my hon. Friend, drawing on the great financial tradition that exists in Yorkshire, Leeds and Halifax.

Dr. John Cunningham: Is not it surprising and questionable that a merger of such significance, involving £90 billion worth of assets and creating one of the largest financial institutions in Europe, with more than 25 per cent. of the domestic mortgage market and estimated dealings with about 45 per cent. of households in the country, should be nodded through, and the announcement made the day after the House had risen for the Christmas recess?

The merger may well have great attractions—as the hon. Gentleman said—and I am not saying that it will prove to be a bad thing, but it is of such a significance and scale that the employees and customers of the two societies were entitled to expect the most thorough and rigorous examination of all the aspects of it. They did not get it.

Mr. Evans: All the relevant factors were considered in the most thorough detail. I find the right hon. Gentleman's remarks somewhat surprising, especially in the context that he would have been the first to complain if staff and the societies had been kept waiting inexorably for a decision once the President of the Board of Trade was in a position to reach a proper decision. My right hon. Friend received the papers from the Director General of Fair Trading and gave at least six days' consideration to the recommendation that was made by the director general.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman is among the first to suggest that the observations made by the Director General of Fair Trading do not receive sufficient attention by the Department of Trade and Industry. I find it surprising that on this occasion he should challenge the very recommendation that the President of the Board of Trade has decided to endorse.

Exports

9. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of exports (a) in 1993 and (b) in 1979.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Our visible exports were worth £121 billion in 1993 as compared with £40 billion in 1979.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister agree that, when the lot opposite were last in government, they had record exports? It was called the brain drain. Why? We had a 98 per cent. rate of tax, 27 per cent. inflation, and rats as big as cats running round Leicester square. Is not it a fact that the current Government have put the "Great" back into Britain through record exports?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend shows admirable precision and clarity about the dangers of a possible Labour Government. Indeed, in expressing things so clearly, he is becoming the Newt Gingrich of British politics.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister might not agree, but were the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) to emigrate, it would be no great loss. Would the Minister care to amplify his answer and tell the House the rate of imports in 1979 and last year, and the trade deficit in 1979 compared to that of last year?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman would risk losing an item of national heritage in his wish to export my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans)—I certainly would not recommend that to the House. To answer the hon. Gentleman's question, imports rose in volume by 78 per cent. during the period that we are discussing. What is most interesting now is that the effects of the improvement in manufacturing productivity are now showing in manufacturing exports. Exports—which drive the economic recovery—were, in the third quarter of 1994, up 14 per cent. to the world and 19 per cent. to the EC. Rather than looking backwards, the hon. Gentleman should look forwards and welcome that tremendous economic performance.

Mr. Butcher: Almost unheralded and unnoted there has been an astonishing improvement in exports from the manufacturing sector, particularly the engineering sector, in the west midlands. Will my hon. Friend the Minister come and witness some of the improvements in Coventry, in companies such as GPT, Jaguar and Massey Ferguson? The most significant worldwide investment programme—investment in the new digital super-highways—is being led by GPT, which is currently exporting into 30 telecommunications networks around the world. Something dramatic is going on out there and we should recognise that.

Mr. Taylor: I strongly welcome my hon. Friend's comments. As he knows, I was in Coventry just before Christmas and know from first hand, being a Coventrian, the importance of industry to that city. Unlike Opposition Members, even *The Guardian* has caught up with the fact that high-tech industries lead our economic recovery, particularly in export markets. As the Minister with responsibility for technology, I am delighted about that—and not surprised because as I go around the companies I see how successful they are. Those companies all cite the fact that the stable economic background and low inflation in this country enable them to continue to be competitive in world markets.

Mr. Harvey: Do not the Government's claims on exports sit uncomfortably with the statistics of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which show that Britain has the slowest rate of growth in exports of any G7 country since 1979? Is not one of the main reasons for that the fact that

manufacturing investment as a proportion of GDP fell to an all-time low in the first half of 1994 and has continued falling in recent quarters?.

Mr. Taylor: The reality is that the volume of UK-manufactured exports grew faster than those of France, Germany and Japan for the bulk of the 1980s. We should be pleased to accept that figure. The export volume of manufacturers in the third quarter of 1994 was up by 12 per cent. Opposition parties should welcome those figures as they create jobs in their constituencies. Occasionally, Opposition Members should not only welcome the figures, but give credit where credit is due—to the Government's economic performance.

Inward Investment

10. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the prospects for inward investment.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I am confident—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who he?"] And a happy new year to the Labour party, too.

I am confident that overseas companies will continue to recognise that the Government's economic policies make the United Kingdom an attractive place to do business and that we will remain the preferred location in Europe for foreign investment. The prospects are excellent, but success has to be worked for. For that reason I have strengthened my Department's Invest in Britain bureau, including the appointment of a chief executive from the private sector.

Mr. Waterson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that one of the attractions to inward investors is the fact that in France, for example, about 29 per cent. of total labour costs go on non-wage social costs, whereas the equivalent figure in this country is only 17 per cent.?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right to state the discrepancies and problems that would arise from Brussels if we did not possess the opt-out to the social contract. The problems in Brussels are ever present in the mind of the Labour party, the leader of which has had to go to Brussels to put the boot in to members of his own party who are trying to upstage his key proposals to modernise the Labour party—what a hope!

Mr. Stevenson: Is it not true that much of the so-called "investment" has been in the form of takeovers and asset swaps, some of which have turned out to be no more than asset strips? Is the President of the Board of Trade aware of the activities of the Dupont company, for example, which acquired much of the capacity of ICI and resulted in many plant closures and job losses?

Will the Minister inquire into that disgraceful situation involving a major American-based international company? Will he also ensure that the trade unions which represent the workers at the plant and which have been refused the information that they need in order to make representations on behalf of their members are given that information?

Mr. Heseltine: It is absolutely extraordinary: this country is facing some of the most exciting economic prospects that we have enjoyed in decades and Opposition Members carp and moan as though the results are nothing like as good as they are.

It is time that the Opposition recognised that we have moved back into a balance of payments surplus. That is a huge tribute to the policies of the Government. Why cannot the Labour party tell people the good news and encourage, as opposed to constantly undermine, the efforts of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Page: While being grateful for and impressed by the huge amount of inward investment and the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of jobs that have been created, will my right hon. Friend speculate about whether he believes that that inward investment flow will be enhanced or diminished by the Labour MEPs' enthusiasm for clause IV?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises the point to which I referred a moment ago. The Leader of the Opposition is flogging around Brussels at the moment because he is absolutely terrified of the damage that his own supporters are doing to his prospects of ever leading this country. I must say that my sympathies are all on the side of the Labour MEPs who are obviously determined—

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Points of order come after Question Time, but I will anticipate what the hon. Gentleman wishes to say: at Question Time we deal with Government policy, not Opposition policy. I call Dr. Cunningham.

Dr. John Cunningham: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good inward investment in the British economy is welcome. However, is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that inward investment from Hong Kong Land and the Swiss Bank Corporation is being conducted properly in the hostile takeover bid for Northern Electric? Is there not a case for an inquiry into the Northern Electric share dealings, for example? Is not there a question of insider dealing and the exploitation of legal loopholes by the Swiss Bank Corporation?

Is it acceptable that those practices should go on in a hostile takeover bid for a regional electricity company? Will those matters not set the trend for the future ownership of regional electricity companies? Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that there are so many questionable aspects to the bid that he should ask the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to investigate all parts of it?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman raises some very important issues. He will understand that inquiries are being conducted in the proper manner and it would be quite inappropriate for me to add in any way to a general acknowledgement of those inquiries.

Mr. Sykes: Talking about inward investment and its importance in creating jobs, is my right hon. Friend aware that a large international company in my constituency, when faced recently with a decision about whether to build a new factory in France, decided not to do so because of the cost of the social chapter? It decided instead to double the size of the production line in Scarborough—much to the benefit of my constituents.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend gives the House more good news. Inward investment at present accounts for

17 per cent. of employment in this country, 23 per cent. of net output, and 33 per cent. of gross value added in manufacturing.

Carpet Manufacturers (Subsidies)

11. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding illegal subsidies to European carpet manufacturers.

Mr. Eggar: The UK Government maintain regular contact with the Commission to monitor its progress in pursuing cases of illegal aid in this sector and will continue to do so to ensure that the Commission does not let the matter go by default.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful for that response. Will the Minister press the EC particularly with regard to Belgium and the illegal subsidies that the Belgian Government have given to carpet manufacturers operating in this country—notably the Beaulieu and Fabelta companies? The Belgian Government were found guilty of supplying illegal subsides to those companies, thus allowing them to operate in this country to the detriment of British carpet manufacturers. I have a constituency interest in the matter. Shaw Carpets Ltd. in my constituency announced the redundancies of 50 per cent. of its work force over Christmas, and its difficulties arise, in part, from those illegal subsidies.

Mr. Eggar: I am well aware of the concern of the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members on both sides of the House about the Belgian case in particular. As the House probably knows, Belgian aid to the Beaulieu carpet company, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, has been ruled illegal. The Belgian Government and the Belgian courts are currently involved in action to recover from the company aid that was given illegally and that is proceeding. The United Kingdom Government are keeping in close touch with the Commission to make sure that pressure is maintained to ensure repayment. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the United Kingdom's success in making sure that the Maastricht treaty provides for fines on member states that do not comply with judgments.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: While I welcome the new marketing efforts of the carpet industry, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is of concern that 52 per cent. of the British market in carpets is foreign supplied, and it has taken no fewer than seven years for the Belgian Government still not to pay back the £5 million subsidy they gave Beaulieu? In that regard, will my right hon. Friend engage with the European Commission to examine the possible subsidies on the cost of polypropylene to Belgian carpet companies to the competitive disadvantage of British carpet companies, which have seen polypropylene prices rise by 20 per cent. in the past year when there does not seem to have been an equal effect on Belgian carpet manufacturers?

Mr. Eggar: I assure my hon. Friend that we share his concern on that particular aid case and we are monitoring carefully the position in Belgium. We are keen to work closely with the British carpet industry to make sure that competition is absolutely fair and that the general state aid rules are applied evenly across the European Union.

Aerospace Industry

12. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the amount of cash earned in Britain by the aerospace industry in 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Figures are not yet available for 1993. In 1992 the aerospace industry's contribution to GDP was £4.3 billion.

Mr. Jones: The figures are magnificent. They prove that British Aerospace plc is making a great contribution to British manufacturing and exports. With that in mind, does the Minister agree that it would be appropriate for the Government to give British Aerospace a vote of confidence by stating that the British Government will purchase the future large aircraft? Does he know that my constituents are experts in wing technology and already make the wing of the Airbus? They would be extremely keen to see the Government place that order. Additionally, perhaps British Aerospace could produce the successor to the aging Nimrod.

Mr. Eggar: I am aware of the important role that aerospace plays in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the particular interest that he personally has displayed on behalf of his constituents and in support of British Aerospace. On 16 December my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made an important announcement with regard to the FLA. He stated clearly that we will rejoin the FLA programme when it is managed commercially by the Airbus consortium. He also stated that we expect to have a requirement of between 40 and 50 FLA. His announcement was warmly welcomed by the aerospace industry and by British Aerospace in particular, as it included the announcement of an order for 25 C130J aircraft—that benefits some 36 United Kingdom companies involved in the production of those aircraft.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's last point about the maritime aircraft replacement, I can assure him that the DTI will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Defence to make absolutely certain that the commercial and industrial interests are not overlooked in any decision that may be made.

Sir John Cope: My right hon. Friend will be aware that I also welcome the FLA announcement that was made before Christmas. Will he lose no opportunity to emphasise, both within Government and wider, that the tremendous success of Airbus last year in outselling Boeing both reinforces the case that it can deliver on the future large aircraft and emphasises the great importance to the United Kingdom aerospace industry of participation in the project and hence in the future success of Airbus?

Mr. Eggar: It was an extremely important decision for the British and European aerospace industries. Airbus had a very good year last year: for the first time it outsold Boeing, selling 125 aircraft to Boeing's 120. I hope that that considerable achievement will continue into 1995.

Beer Orders

14. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make changes to the beer orders following the planned changes in the management of the Grand Metropolitan estate.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I assume that the hon. Gentleman has in mind the recent decision announced by Grand Metropolitan to withdraw from the direct management of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. These changes have no effect or bearing on the beer orders. I therefore have no plans to make any changes to those orders.

Mr. Wareing: Is it not time that the DTI carried out a thorough inquiry into the pub activities of Grand Metropolitan through Inntrepreneur Estates, in which Grand Metropolitan still owns a share? Is the Minister aware that last year 10 per cent. of Inntrepreneur tenants were driven out of business because of the chronic over-renting of premises and other aggressive policies pursued by Lord Shepherd and Grand Metropolitan? Is he aware that most Inntrepreneur tenants now regard Lord Shepherd and Grand Metropolitan as the Rachman of today's pub trade? It is alleged that there have been 14 suicides among tenants of the organisation.

Mr. Evans: I am aware that my predecessor met the hon. Gentleman last year, together with representatives of the tenants. I am also aware that a delegation led, I believe, by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), had a meeting with my predecessor. It was made clear at that time that the Department is perfectly happy to investigate—and will arrange for the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate—any allegation of a breach of the beer orders, or any breach of undertakings given by IEL at the time of the takeover.

Such matters as have come to the Department's attention since then have been investigated. I am bound to say, however, that given the strength of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), I rather hoped that he would be more forthcoming. The Department could not be asked to do more than make that offer to the hon. Gentleman, if there are specific allegations of breaches of the beer orders or of undertakings made by IEL.

Mr. Couchman: The House will know that until recently I ran a family company operating public houses in London. I wish to dissociate myself from the remarks of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). I have now disposed of my interest in that company, apart from remaining a non-executive director for a brief period.

It is now five years since the flawed report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, "The Supply of Beer", was published and the beer orders were passed by the House. May I urge my hon. Friend to get his Department to review the operation of those orders? The British pub remains in severe jeopardy as a result of many factors, not simply the orders themselves.

Mr. Evans: As I told the hon. Member for West Derby, my Department is certainly prepared to investigate any specific allegations that are made. If my hon. Friend has any such allegations to put before the Department, they will be examined.

Exports

15. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the level of exports by price and volume for the last 12 months; and what were the figures for the previous 12 months.

Mr. Needham: In the third quarter of 1994, underlying exports rose by 14 per cent. in volume and by 15 per cent. in value.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is not the present buoyancy of our overseas trade as good a piece of news as we have had for many a year, and is not the export-led recovery that we are now experiencing the best possible augury for sustained prosperity for this country for years ahead?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is right. At a time when Opposition Members and many in the press were forecasting an increase in our deficit, that deficit is declining. Let me tell the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who asked a question earlier, that since 1981 the volume of United Kingdom-manufactured exports has grown faster than that of the exports of France, Germany or Japan; our world trade in manufactures has stabilised; last year we increased our share of the export markets, and we are likely to continue to do so this year. The deficit in manufactures is declining, and there could not possibly be better news for the country.

Mr. O'Hara: It is indeed many a year since we heard such good news. I notice that the Minister took 1981, not 1979, as his base date. Does he recognise, however, that an important reason for our improved export performance—particularly to our major markets in Europe—is the swifter recovery in consumer spending in Europe? What measures can he announce today to ensure that, when consumer spending eventually recovers in this country, domestic manufacturing capacity will be expanded to meet the ensuing demand for consumer goods?

Mr. Needham: The best way to expand domestic demand is on the back of an export-led boom. The hon. Gentleman always claims that I start from 1981, not 1979, so just to please him I shall start from 1979. Between 1977 and 1979, when the hon. Gentleman's party was in power, the surplus on manufacturing declined by 3 percentage points of GDP. Had the Opposition continued in power with that sort of record, we would now have a minus figure of 16 per cent.—and getting worse—instead of a figure of minus one, and getting better.

Inward Investment

16. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest estimate of the proportion of total European inward investment which is captured by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heseltine: In 1993 the UK had 41 per cent. by value of the stock of Japanese investment in the EC and 43 per cent. by value of the stock of United States investment in the EC. Comparable stock figures are not readily available from other countries outside the EC.

Dr. Spink: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this superb inward investment performance greatly contributes to our economic success at the moment? Can he confirm

that inward investment would be threatened if we followed the policies espoused by the Opposition parties—policies such as a minimum wage and the adoption of the social chapter? Would they not destroy inward investment, and with it our economic success and millions of jobs in this country?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right. That is why we are determined to fight for the British interest: to ensure that the excesses of the social chapter are never applied here.

Mr. Clelland: Does the Secretary of State recall, during the debates on privatisation, that Opposition Members were repeatedly told that inward investment opportunities from Europe and elsewhere would be enhanced by the regionally based nature of the privatised electricity companies? Indeed, the White Paper went to some lengths to spell out the advantages of such companies. Notwithstanding what the right hon. Gentleman has said today about the complications of the takeover bid for Northern Electric by Trafalgar, do the Government still believe in the principle of regionally based electricity companies—yes or no?

Mr. Heseltine: Yes.

Mr. Colvin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that during today's exchanges we have heard many reasons for the improved inward investment to the United Kingdom as a share of the total in Europe; but should we not add to those the fact that we have a stable Government with a fundamental belief in free enterprise, a highly skilled work force which is far more mobile than it used to be because of our housing reforms, the best industrial relations record in Europe, and we are members of the European Union without the social chapter? Does he agree that all those advantages could be put at risk if the alternative Government sitting opposite us were elected?

Mr. Heseltine: I quarrel only with my hon. Friend's use of one word. There is no credible alternative Government on the Opposition Benches.

Post Office

17. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's policy on allowing commercial freedoms to the Post Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The Post Office operates several businesses. We are actively engaged in widening the opportunities for Post Office Counters and are helping to automate its services.

We will announce any plans to change the present arrangements governing the remainder of Post Office activities in due course.

Mr. Barnes: The Government are still in favour of Post Office privatisation even though they have been forced by some of their Back Benchers and by the Opposition to drop it. Will they now consider the position of the Union of Communication Workers, which is against privatisation but for commercial freedom operating fully within the public sector? Will the Government bear that in mind as an alternative to any proposals that they may want to introduce at a later stage?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman obviously does not even realise that 19,000 of the 20,000 post offices are already privately owned.

Mr. Dykes: May I thank my right hon. Friend for kindly responding to the suggestions that my colleagues and I put to him at a meeting before Christmas about the future of the Post Office? Will he confirm that decisions should be made sooner rather than later to remove uncertainties, which do not help the management or the work force? Importantly, as option 1 was specifically mentioned as one of the possibilities or probable policies in the Green Paper, we should proceed with the component of full commercial freedom for a very successful corporation.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will understand the inherent difficulties in equating full commercial freedom with public ownership.

Mr. Wilson: As that answer suggests, is the Secretary of State still sulking in his tent and refusing to accept the defeat which was inflicted upon him not only by hon. Members on both sides of the House but, above all, by the British public? Instead of a grudging response, will he agree, before he gives evidence to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry at the end of the month, to come forward with some positive and creative proposals that will find support throughout the House and the country for giving the Post Office greater commercial freedom within the public sector, which it wants and deserves?

Mr. Heseltine: It is very easy for the hon. Gentleman to make wild suggestions. When the Labour party was in power, it never occurred to it to do any such things. In fact, the Labour Government did exactly the opposite and held back Royal Mail and Post Office investment, as they did in the rest of the public sector. It is nothing but the most trivial political hypocrisy for the Labour party, which slaughtered the capital investment programmes of the nationalised industries using the excuse of proper management of the national economy, to suggest that when it is in Opposition it is possible to change the disciplines that we are discussing.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You were clairvoyant earlier when I wanted to ask a question. I know that you are diligent in drawing hon. Members to order when questions do not relate to ministerial responsibility. Will you read the supplementary questions of Conservative Members to the Prime Minister yesterday, some of which did not relate directly to the responsibility of Ministers? Would you make it clear to Conservative Members and Ministers that if they want an opportunity to question the policies of the Labour party, the Liberals or any other party, there is a simple way of doing so, and that is to have a general election?

Madam Speaker: Not for the first time do I draw to the attention of the House the fact that our system operates on the basis that it is the Government who are responsible to the people through the House for their policies, the implementation of them and the effect that they have. It is never more apparent than at Question Time that the House should seek to question the Government on their policies. That is what Question Time is all about. I remind all Back-Bench Members of that, and those who occupy the Front Benches. It is those on the Government Front Bench who are responsible for the policies that they implement. They are answerable for those policies, and never more than at Question Time.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you have had a demand for a statement from the Home Secretary on a Cabinet Committee document, a copy of which I have in my possession, which sets out how the Government will deal with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board's scheme following the Court of Appeal ruling of 9 November 1994 that the scheme was illegal. The document suggests that the tariff scheme is being introduced because it will save up to £100 million a year. The Government intend to proceed by way of enabling legislation, thereby avoiding detailed parliamentary scrutiny.

I hope that you agree, Madam Speaker, that that is not the way to drive legislation through Parliament. What advice do you have for me for the sake of many thousands of victims who will lose financially as a result of the Government's intentions? Surely Parliament should be given the opportunity to debate the Cabinet Committee document as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker: That hardly seems to be a point of order for me. I cannot comment on a leaked document—I understand the hon. Gentleman to say that that is what it is. I have received no request for a Minister to make a statement. The hon. Gentleman must find other ways to pursue the matter.

BILL PRESENTED

ENERGY SAVING MATERIALS (RATE OF VALUE ADDED TAX)

Mr. Alan Simpson, supported by Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Sir John Hannam, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. Terry Rooney, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. David Rendel, Mr. Gary Waller, Mr. Michael Clapham and Mr. Harry Barnes presented a Bill to limit the amount of value added tax payable on certain energy-saving materials; to require the Secretary of State to compile a definitive list of such materials; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January and to be printed. [Bill 31.]

Media (Diversity)

3.34 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to regulate the ownership of the media.

My Bill will reverse the growing trend towards monopoly ownership of most of what we see on our television screens and read in our newspapers. The purpose of the Bill is to protect our culture and democracy from the barbarism of the unregulated market. I hope that it will appeal to democrats of all political persuasions. I am glad to say that it has attracted support from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Although our television has always been carefully regulated, it has long been the situation that many of our national and regional newspapers are controlled by unscrupulous megalomaniacs. Now, the same people are taking control of our television. Rupert Murdoch, who owns five national newspapers, also has what is effectively a controlling interest in satellite television, which, we are told, will be in one home in two by the end of the century. Michael Green, of Carlton, has acquired Central Television, and with it a 36 per cent. stake in Independent Television News and a similar stake in Independent Radio News. Granada Television, headed by a ruthless profiteer, Mr. Gerry Robinson, has acquired London Weekend Television and with it a 36 per cent. stake in ITN, all in defiance of section 32 of the Broadcasting Act 1990, which says that no shareholding in ITN may exceed 20 per cent., precisely with a view to preserving its independence.

Every day, the frontiers that regulate the independence and quality of our television are pushed back a little further. The Government are under enormous pressure to remove what restrictions remain and to let the market rip. And not only the Government. Seeing the possibility of a Labour victory at the next election, a massive bout of free-lunching has been unleashed by the vested interests concerned, and its purpose is to persuade my right hon. and hon. Friends charged with responsibility in these matters that big is beautiful, that the triumph of the market is inevitable and that it will not diminish the quality of the product. One of the purposes of the Bill is to stiffen the resolve of my hon. Friends.

The rise of Messrs. Murdoch, Green, Robinson and others has already led to a marked decline in standards. Documentaries such as "This Week" have disappeared. "World in Action", one of the last refuges for inquiring journalism, has been under heavy pressure. Even ITN's "News at Ten" is not safe as the new masters press for its removal to a more obscure slot, to make way for an unending diet of bland American movies. Already there has been an obvious decline in quality at ITN, a reluctance to invest in foreign reporting, and an increasing tendency to conduct long and pointless live interviews between an anchorman in Grays Inn road and a correspondent rarely more than two or three miles away. The other day on ITN there was a lengthy item on Kermit the frog.

There is talk of new technology bringing in 20, 30 or 40 channels. It is said that we will have more choice, but in fact we will have less. We are headed down the American road—40 channels with nothing worth watching on any of them and our culture colonised by American junk television. Our domestic television production capacity will be wiped out, just as our film industry has been. Indeed, it is already happening. The industry is being remorselessly casualised. Since the Broadcasting Act, the number of full-time jobs in commercial television has halved. Who will provide the training for future generations of television film makers when the present generation is gone? Or are the new masters just intending to poach from the BBC?

What I fear most is not political bias, but the steady growth of junk journalism—the trivialisation and demeaning of everything that is important in our lives, and its consequent effect on our culture, a flat refusal to address what is going on in the world in favour of an endless diet of crime, game shows and soap operas, and the unadulterated hate that is already a feature of our most loathsome tabloid newspapers. In the long run, there is a danger—I put it no higher—that, with an increasing concentration of ownership and progressive abandonment of standards, television will become fertile ground for demagogues, offering simple solutions to complex problems. One has only to look at the rise of the religious right in America, or to Italy—governed until recently by a man who owns three major television stations—for a clue as to where the future may lie.

My Bill has three principal purposes. First, it seeks to enforce diversity of newspaper and television ownership in the belief that healthy competition rather than monopoly is the best way to ensure the survival of our democracy.

Secondly, the Bill seeks to provide for a minimum level of quality in the firm belief that that is the best way to protect our television from the rise of junk culture.

Thirdly, the Bill seeks to create a level playing field between commercial and satellite television. At the moment satellite television is exempt from many of the regulations that apply to terrestrial television.

I shall list some of the specific measures contained in the Bill. First, there is a requirement that no national newspaper proprietor shall be permitted to own more than one daily or one Sunday newspaper. Surplus assets must be placed on the market within 12 months of the Bill being enacted.

Secondly, no one who is not a citizen of the European Community shall in future be permitted to own more than 20 per cent. of any company owning British national or regional newspapers or British terrestrial or satellite television. That provision is based on similar regulations that already apply in the United States.

Thirdly, no company which has a controlling interest in a British national newspaper shall be permitted to own a stake of more than 20 per cent. in a British television company, terrestrial or satellite.

Fourthly, no company that has a controlling interest in either terrestrial or satellite television broadcasting to the United Kingdom shall be permitted to own more than 20 per cent. of a British national newspaper.

Fifthly, a given percentage of the output of any television company, satellite or terrestrial, broadcasting to the United Kingdom, shall be produced within the EC. That will extend to satellite television a provision which is already enforced on terrestrial stations.

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

Sixthly, no company shall be permitted to own more than 20 per cent. of ITN, IRN or any other national broadcast news service and any surplus should be disposed of within 12 months of the Act coming into force.

Seventhly, no company with a controlling interest in any local television or radio station or in any local newspaper shall be permitted to own more than 20 per cent. of any other media outlet covering the same catchment area.

Eighthly, no company shall be allowed to own more than 20 per cent. of the encryption system for satellite television and any surplus shall be placed on the market within 12 months. Hon. Members will be aware that at present Mr. Murdoch has a monopoly of the encryption system which prevents anyone else gaining access to the satellite market.

Ninthly, substantial regional commercial television production facilities must be maintained in at least the six largest population centres outside London.

Tenthly, a training levy will be imposed on any television company employing more than 100 people which does not spend a given percentage of its income on training.

Those measures should appeal to civilised people of all political persuasions. They are, as I have said, designed to protect our democracy and culture from the barbarism of the unregulated market. In many respects they merely enshrine or build upon regulations that already exist. Overall they will have the effect of introducing competition into areas where fair competition is being progressively stifled or eliminated.

We should not be afraid of regulation. Our broadcasting system has been carefully regulated throughout its existence and, as a result, it is widely admired around the world. I am anxious that it should remain so and that is the purpose of the Bill. I commend it to the House.

3.42 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): There we have it. Behind the Colgate ring-of-confidence smile of the Leader of the Opposition we have the authentic voice of socialism on his Back Benches. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) uses the words "barbarism of the market" and "ruthless profiteer", but nowhere in the Bill does he acknowledge the existence of new technologies and the way in which the market operates in the United Kingdom and the world in general.

I oppose the Bill on two grounds. First, as I say, it does not acknowledge changes in technology and, secondly, the unilateral changes that the hon. Gentleman would like to see in the United Kingdom would put us at a great disadvantage compared with the rest of Europe and the world.

I quote two authoritative people. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), Chairman of the Select Committee on National Heritage on which I have the honour to serve, said:

"Of course there are dangers in monopolistic cross-media ownership, but at the same time in my view without cross-media ownership there is no commercial viability in the new environment."

The right hon. Gentleman is right and the hon. Member for Sunderland, South is wrong.

Here is another quotation:

"Traditional distinctions between printed press and broadcasting channels will be difficult to sustain when all forms of media use the same cable to deliver their output electronically. In those circumstances it may no longer be sensible to maintain restrictions on cross-media ownership in their present form."

That is an argument for less legislation, not more. Did it come from the Conservative party manifesto? No. Was it written by a Conservative Member? No. It came from a document called "Winning for Britain" published in June last year by the Labour party. Funnily enough, the Labour party got it right and the hon. Member for Sunderland, South got it wrong.

I believe in firm governance tempered by economic freedom and political and economic reality. If the Bill were ever to become law it would open the door for the Berlusconis and the Bertelsmans of this world. When the hon. Gentleman so traditionally attacks Rupert Murdoch he should remember that although News International, a United Kingdom-based company, has interests in *The Sun*, *The Times* and 50 per cent. of BSkyB, the Guardian Media Group owns *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, 36 local weeklies, 15 per cent. of GMTV and 20 per cent. of Trans World Communications.

I could tell the hon. Gentleman similar facts about Pearson, the Daily Mail and General Trust, and Reed Elsevier. However, I would rather have all those groups operating successfully than allow Berlusconi and Bertelsman to dominate the media in the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe and the rest of the world. For those reasons, I oppose the motion.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Chris Mullin, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Cyril D. Townsend, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Denis MacShane, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Dr. Tony Wright, Mr. Hugh Dykes, Ms Jean Corston, Sir Richard Body, Mr. Dafydd Wigley and Mr. Andrew F. Bennett.

MEDIA (DIVERSITY)

Mr. Chris Mullin accordingly presented a Bill to regulate the ownership of the media: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 February and to be printed. [Bill 30.]

Orders of the Day

Committee of Selection

3.46 pm

Madam Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Government's motion uses the term "party" three times. It says not "the Conservative party" but simply "party". In the ensuing debate we shall hear many references to the Conservative party and to political parties in general, so I should like your advice, Madam Speaker, on how that term is to be defined.

The Conservative party as such seems to be non-existent. It has no definition in relation to the House and the 1922 Committee, which seems to be the umbrella organisation, has no standing orders. The Conservative party itself is not incorporated and does not publish an annual report and accounts. Indeed, it seems to be a wholly owned subsidiary of the Prime Minister, without accountability to anyone.

Madam Speaker: That is all very interesting, but it seems to me that it is a matter for debate if the hon. Gentleman were to catch my eye. I am wondering what the point of order for me is at this stage.

Mr. Madden: The point of order is that the debate hinges on the central issue of majorities on Committees. I cannot understand how that debate can be conducted in an informed way if none of us is aware of how the Conservative party or Conservative Members of Parliament are defined. There is no such thing as a Conservative party.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have been enormously tolerant. This is all very interesting. I am sure that the House will be most interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's views on the matter, but they cannot be expressed on a point of order. I cannot say that I am willing to call the hon. Gentleman because I shall have many people to call, if I ever have a chance to get the motion under way. If the hon. Gentleman will come to his point of order, I might be able to answer it. Otherwise, perhaps he will save his remarks for the debate so that we can all enjoy them.

Mr. Madden: I ask you to consider whether the motion is in order, as the motion refers only to "party".

Madam Speaker: That is a very simple point of order. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the motion would not be printed on the Order Paper unless it had been thoroughly examined not only by me but by several other people. It has been considered by learned Clerks of the House, but most importantly by me. It would not have appeared on the Order Paper unless it was perfectly in order for debate today.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: It cannot be another point of order.

Mr. Jessel: It is further to that same point of order.

Madam Speaker: No. I will not allow that. I call the Leader of the House to move the perfectly in order motion.

3.51 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That, unless and until the party which achieved an overall majority of Members elected at the preceding general election loses that majority either as a result of by-elections or through the secession of Members to another party, the Committee of Selection shall interpret paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees) in such a way as to give that party a majority on any standing committee.

I need only briefly describe the background, which I believe is familiar to the House. Under Standing Order No. 86, Standing Committees of the House are appointed by the Committee of Selection, which is enjoined to have regard, among other things, to the composition of the House.

In the ordinary course of events, even though the meaning of the phrase is nowhere more clearly defined, its intention has been clearly understood to be to ensure that the Committees reflect party proportions in the House and, therefore, to give a Government with an overall majority in the House a majority on the Standing Committees which consider legislation. Such difficulty as has occurred, with the principal exception perhaps of an occasion in 1976 to which I shall return in a moment, has normally been in applying the somewhat arcane mathematical formulae with which the concept is given practical effect, which has led at times to disagreement about the precise size of majorities on particular Committees.

Mr. Madden: The Leader of the House will admit that in the real world the Committee of Selection is told whom to select for Committees by the respective party Whips. Therefore, the prospect of the nine Conservative Members who have had the Whip withdrawn being selected to serve on any Standing Committees is remote to say the least. May I put to the Leader of the House the question that I put to Madam Speaker: how does he define the Conservative party in the House? The Whip has been withdrawn from nine individuals who happen to have been elected to the House in the Conservative cause. They do not belong to any organisation comparable to the parliamentary Labour party. The PLP has standing orders. The 1922 Committee does not. How does he define the Conservative party? Are Members who are known as Conservative Members part of any recognisable party structure or organisation in the House?

Mr. Newton: It is certainly the case that the 1922 Committee, rather like the British constitution, is based largely on an unwritten constitution. As to whether the

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Conservative party can be recognised, I can recognise it when I see it, and there are more of us than there are of them and we are sitting over here.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): How does the Leader of the House answer the charge made on the radio at lunchtime today by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) that the motion on the Order Paper today is fiddling with the constitution?

Mr. Newton: For reasons that I hope to explain in a moment, I do not accept that view. As it happens, I did not hear my right hon. Friend on the radio at lunchtime. He may seek to catch your eye, Madam Speaker, and elaborate his point during the debate.

I was explaining that in general, although not exclusively, the main difficulties for the Committee of Selection have arisen from determining the size of majorities, rather than from identifying who is to have a majority. In the circumstances that have arisen in recent weeks, following the action taken by my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip in respect of eight of my hon. Friends and the consequent action by another of my hon. Friends on his own, there has been a strong divergence of view about what the phrase "the composition of the House" is to be taken to mean. We therefore thought it right for that dispute to be resolved on the Floor of the House, rather than leaving the Committee of Selection and its diligent Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), in continuing difficulties in fulfilling their duties week by week.

The purpose of my motion is to resolve the matter and to do so in a way that would establish a firmer basis for dealing with any comparable difficulty in the future.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Can the Leader of the House assure us that, in promoting this motion, the Government intend that all Members of Parliament elected as Conservatives at the last election, irrespective of their present relationship with the party, will receive equal treatment by the Committee of Selection in the consideration of their qualifications for Committee membership? In other words, will there be no veto?

Mr. Newton: I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that there will be no veto. He will know that, unlike the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), we regard the selection of Committees as a matter for the Committee of Selection. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale nodding. Subject to that caveat, we would not wish to, nor would we seek to, exclude from consideration my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) or the other hon. Members concerned.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way as this matter is very important. We may be in danger of disfranchising the nine Members of Parliament about whom we are talking. As a member of the Committee of Selection it is well known to me, and I am sure to the right hon. Gentleman, too, that I am responsible for nominating all other Members, other than those who are part of the Conservative party or the official Opposition. As a result of what he just said, am I to be expected to make recommendations for Standing Committee membership on behalf of those nine Members of Parliament, or will the Government officially put forward their names for inclusion in the membership of any Standing Committees that we may create?

Mr. Newton: I think that I made the position clear. On the hon. Gentleman's first question, the position is absolutely clear. No, we certainly do not expect him to take responsibility for nominating the Members of Parliament in question for selection for Standing Committees. I have made it absolutely clear—I shall repeat the words—that we would not wish to, nor would we seek to, exclude those Members from consideration as Conservative members of the Standing Committees—there would be no veto.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Perhaps my right hon. Friend could emphasise the fact that two of our hon. Friends who do not take the Whip serve on Select Committees and the Committee of Selection has made no attempt to remove them.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is not relevant.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: With great respect, I think that it has a bearing on this. We could have tried to remove them, but we made no attempt to do so and we accept them as members.

Mr. Newton: That is absolutely right and I stress that point. Three of my hon. Friends in the position at issue in this debate are members of Select Committees. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale raised the matter. Perhaps I might be allowed to acknowledge and agree with what he said. There is no intention of trying to remove those Members from Select Committees.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that the problem does not arise with Select Committees because, by custom, a member of a Select Committee cannot be removed from it simply because he happens to disagree with the Government generally or on a specific matter. The problem does arise in respect of Standing Committees, however. Is it not the case that, as far as the Conservative party is concerned, most Members write to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection saying that they want to be considered for a Committee? The Whips Office also makes recommendations. There are a number of ways in which people can show their interest in a Committee. Even if we are not part of the official party for some temporary reason, it does not stop us writing to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection .

Mr. Newton: I agree with every single word that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) has just uttered.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): My hon. Friend the Chairman of the Committee of Selection may have had a slip of the tongue when he referred to Select rather than Standing Committees. Will my right hon. Friend make it absolutely clear that there is no question of the Committee of Selection seeking to remove people from Select Committees? They are appointed for a Parliament and can be removed only by a motion on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Newton: Of course that is right. Select Committee membership is determined by a motion that must be

passed by the House. To avoid any doubt, there would be and is no question of seeking to remove any of the hon. Members in question from Select Committees.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House clarify some of the terminology that has been used so far in the debate? The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) referred to his colleagues who "do not take the Whip". That is not the correct terminology. It is a question not of not taking the Whip but of the Whip being withdrawn. In view of the statement which the Leader of the House was making about appointments to Standing Committees, will he say exactly what is meant by "withdrawal of the Conservative Whip"?

Mr. Newton: It is not for me to describe on the Floor of the House the internal arrangements of this party or any other. My purpose in tabling the motion and making a speech—I am making it with some difficulty in view of the number of interventions—is to explain what I believe is appropriate to the procedures and Standing Orders of the House, and their interpretation.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Given that the Leader of the House said that the hon. Members in question will not be debarred from Standing Committees—incidentally, Standing Committees are all that we are discussing today, and all that is referred to in paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 86, the motion and the amendments to it—will he explain what happened when the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) had the Whip withdrawn? When he approached the Whips Office to get on a Standing Committee, he was directed to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) to see whether he could get the position of another member of the Standing Committee.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household, who occupies the position opposite to the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), assures me that that was not the case. In any event, it is not the case in the present issue.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): As one of the two hon. Members specifically referred to—I am a member of the Select Committee on Agriculture—will the Leader of the House be kind enough to give me one good reason why I should vote for this motion, given that the Government could prolong my punishment indefinitely if they win the vote?

Mr. Newton: I hope to give my hon. Friend a number of reasons why he should vote for the motion. On the latter part of his question, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others, including some of my hon. Friends who are in a similar position to my hon. Friend, have made it clear that we all wish to see the matter resolved as speedily as possible.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): Is not the question put by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) the most central one? Is not the withdrawal of the Whip from an hon. Member, or its resignation by an hon. Member, tantamount to his losing membership of the parliamentary party? As that hon. Member's membership of the parliamentary party has then stopped, either temporarily or permanently, have not the Government put themselves in a minority? Are not they therefore denying the logic of the position which they have, for whatever reason, decided to take?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that they have, for the reasons that I shall give in a moment. In effect, they will entail the House making a judgment about whether it wishes to enshrine the position of the Whips in the formal procedures and Standing Orders of the House in a way that has never hitherto been done.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): The motion tabled by the Leader of the House refers to the

"secession of Members to another party".

Can the right hon. Gentleman explain what will happen in a situation where a Member chooses to sit as an independent?

Mr. Newton: He would be a party of one in the same way as the hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) sits as a party of one representing the Ulster Popular Unionist party.

Mr. Gill: If the Leader of the House and other right hon. Gentlemen wish the Whip to be restored to me and the other seven who have had it withdrawn, would he be kind enough to tell me why they do not do just that rather than seek approval for the motion? The answer is self-evidently in their own hands.

Mr. Newton: I hope that with the best will in the world—I mean that; I am not just using words—my hon. Friend would not expect me now to go beyond what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his widely publicised interview on Sunday or to attempt to resolve the matter at this moment. The motion is meant to deal with the particular difficulty that we face and I hope that I may now be allowed to get on to put my argument.

Mr. Budgen: I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend said about the position of a Member who describes himself as independent. That might be the position of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), who resigned the Whip. We, the remaining eight, are in a different position. We say that we are Tories and indeed the Prime Minister described us as being more blue than many of the Tories—it is only the Government who do not describe us as Tories. On the other hand, my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston may be in the position of being an independent. Perhaps my right hon. Friend can explain whether there is a distinction between the eight and the one.

Mr. Newton: It would depend on whether my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) declared that there was a difference in the position, which amounted to him viewing himself as a party of one or as an independent in the terms to which I have already referred. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West for what he just said about

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his own position and that of most, at least, of the others concerned. I am also grateful to him for his article in *The Guardian* yesterday.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Surely the situation is this: if one has the Whip withdrawn, one has one's knuckles rapped; if one has been expelled from the party, one has had one's hands cut off. That is permanent.

Mr. Newton: I take my hon. Friend's point. One thing is absolutely clear—the withdrawal of the Conservative Whip does not constitute expulsion from the Conservative party.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House clearly define at this stage what interpretation he would offer of the nine Members who are no longer members of the parliamentary Conservative party in the House—the eight who were suspended and the one who resigned? One might suggest that the Member who resigned would automatically lose his position, but the eight who have been suspended have been subjected to a particular debate. It is for the Leader of the House to decide into what category those eight Members should be put, because the Committee of Selection, of which I am a member, is having great difficulty deciding how we can appoint people to Committees until such time as the House has decided the issue.

In the early part of December, in reply to the shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), the right hon. Gentleman said that it should be up to the Committee of Selection to make the decision and that it was not a matter for him. The Committee of Selection has failed to reach agreement, hence today's debate on the Floor of the House. Can he explain in what category he believes that those eight Members should be put in the formidable list presented to the Committee of Selection when we determine the numerical strength on each Committee?

Mr. Newton: Surely I have made it clear, in response to a number of interventions by my hon. Friends, that, for this purpose, the Members in question would be regarded as Conservative Members of Parliament.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Leader of the House said that the internal workings of the Government party have nothing to do with the motion before us. How can that be so? In so far as the eight Members are concerned, it is a result of an internal matter in the party concerned. All that the motion does is to pretend that that never happened, for the purposes of the Standing Committee and the Committee of Selection. Is not it using the authority of the House to back up the internal authority that has failed inside the Conservative party?

Mr. Newton: No. The purpose of the motion is almost exactly the opposite, but, as a result of the number of interventions—about which I make no complaint—I have not been able to make the principal argument that I wish to make to the House.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I regret that. My right hon. Friend is being very tolerant indeed.

The motion has long-term implications, which we will reach eventually, and short-term implications. Will my right hon. Friend say, categorically, that, as far as he and the Government are concerned, those of us who do not have the Whip at the moment will be treated in exactly the same way for the purposes of Standing Committee selection as those colleagues who currently have the Whip—yes or no?

Mr. Newton: I think that I made it clear that—although it is a matter for the Committee of Selection—we would expect the Committee of Selection to consider those Members in the same way as other Members, and we would neither wish nor seek to exclude them from such consideration, or to veto them.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Lamont *rose—*

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown) *rose—*

Mr. Newton: I will give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow).

Mr. Marlow: We all know that the usual channels have a great deal of influence on these events. My right hon. Friend is a bit shy about it, but we know that that is the case. Does he agree that colleagues such as myself who do not have the Whip will be treated, as far as the Government and the usual channels are concerned, in an identical way to other colleagues?

Mr. Newton: I think that I have made that clear to my hon. Friend. The best description of the situation was that given by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. The arrangements on the Conservative side of the House have historically been different from the more rigid approach adopted on the Labour side of the House, as I understand it. It is the traditional practice that, on the Conservative side of the House, Members have usually written themselves to the Committee of Selection, and their opinions and wishes are taken into account, together with any thoughts coming from other quarters. That position will continue. I hope that I have said clearly several times that we would neither wish nor seek to exclude those Members from normal consideration by the Committee of Selection.

Sir Andrew Bowden: Will the Leader of the House spell out, loud and clear, that the Members about whom we are talking were elected as Conservative Members of Parliament and continue to be members of the Conservative party, and that that is being confused by an internal operation centring round the word "Whip"? They are Conservatives, they were elected Conservatives and, as long as they remain members of the Conservative party, they are part of the Conservative party strength in the House.

Mr. Newton: In a nutshell, I agree with that and it is the part of my speech that I am trying to reach.

Mr. Lamont: My right hon. Friend, in response to an intervention from an Opposition Member, said that if an hon. Member on the Conservative side of the House resigned the Whip—I am sorry to use that phrase again—but did not join another party, he would count none the less as an independent. My right hon. Friend appears to be drawing a distinction between someone resigning the Whip and having the Whip withdrawn from him, and I cannot see how that distinction can be made.

Mr. Newton: There is a possible distinction, but only in the hypothetical terms in which my hon. Friend the

Member for Wolverhampton, South-West couched it, in suggesting that there might be a difference in one Member's perception of his position. That leads me to one of the points that I want to make later in my speech. I also want to return to the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden).

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Some of us were under the impression that a grievous sin had been committed against the Conservative party by some hon. Members who voted in the wrong Lobby in the autumn, that condign punishment was being meted out to them and that they had to earn their passage back. As it is palpably the case that such hon. Members can vote in any Lobby they choose at the conclusion of any debate on the Floor of the House, and as the Government now seem to be portraying themselves as being solicitous of the interests of those Members should they wish to participate or vote in Committee, what is the nature of the punishment that such Members have received?

Mr. Newton: As I have already said, I do not propose to discuss on the Floor of the House the internal arrangements of the Conservative party any more than I would expect to discuss the internal arrangements of any other parties.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend give me a bit of guidance? We are told that one of the ways in which we may be able to crawl back on our knees into the party is by a display of abject loyalty. Obviously, we very much want to display those characteristics, but there is a practical difficulty. If we do not get the Whip, we do not know when the votes will come, we do not know when anything will be contested and, with the best will in the world, we cannot display the subservience required of us.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The debate so far reinforces the reservations that I and a number of others have about the motion. What is clear so far is that the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) has a fighting chance as an independent to claim Short opposition money to support his party. As long as they are not receiving the Conservative party Whip, the other eight Members have no chance in hell of serving on a Standing Committee. All in all, would it be helpful to you, Madam Speaker, the House and particularly the eight Members who have had the Whip withdrawn if I were to move to withdraw the motion to ease the difficulties facing the Leader of the House? We could return at a later stage when the Whip is restored to the nine Members.

Madam Speaker: It seems that the only difficulty—if difficulty it is—faced by the Leader of the House is that he is not being allowed to get on with his comments, which I am anxious to hear.

Mr. Newton: I shall respond briefly to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, whose intervention I took to be extremely friendly. I assure him that we shall be as helpful as we can in ensuring that he is fully informed about what is going on.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On one occasion the Leader of the House said that there would be no veto, and on another he said that the rebels would be treated the same as everyone else. Is he seriously asking the House and all of us to believe that neither he nor any of the Whips will pass judgment on an application by any of the nine rebels to serve on a European Standing Committee?

Mr. Newton: I have said what I have said several times and I do not propose to repeat it or seek to elaborate it further. The motion would establish a firmer basis for dealing with any comparable difficulty in future. Its purpose is to achieve that aim by stating that the composition of the House is to be regarded as determined by the electorate and the declared position of Members themselves, not by internal party arrangements within the House. Such arrangements are not recognised in our Standing Orders or procedures and are not normally discussed on the Floor of the House—although plainly that can hardly be avoided today.

The motion provides in a clear and straightforward manner that a party with a majority of Members elected at the preceding election shall retain a majority on Standing Committees unless and until it loses that majority, as a result either of seats changing hands at by-elections or Members seceding to another party. I believe that to be not only sensible but constitutionally right in recognising the relationship of Members to those who elect them. In the present House it would, of course, reflect the reality that, of its membership of 651, 330 were elected as Conservatives—which picks up the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kemptown—and are members of the Conservative party who support Conservative principles and who have indicated their broad support for the Government's legislative programme set out in the Queen's Speech. Indeed—this echoes something to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West has referred already—as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his interview on Sunday, some would say that my hon. Friends whose position is at issue are very blue Conservatives indeed.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) will no doubt address the Opposition amendment, my disagreement with which I have already made clear. Its very terms underline the important point at issue, since I think that it would be the first occasion on which an order or resolution of the House had enshrined the position of the Whips. I can only repeat that I do not believe that the composition of the House, for the purpose of our Standing Orders, should be determined by internal party arrangements within the House, but should be determined by the electorate and the declared position of Members of Parliament themselves.

In case the hon. Lady intends to refer to the events of May 1976 as some kind of precedent for her argument today, let me say that I think that exactly the opposite is true. In May 1976 the then Labour Government had lost their majority as a result of by-election defeats and the defection of a Labour Member to a party of his own. It was of course right in those very different circumstances that the Government should cease to have a majority on Standing Committees—as indeed, in similar circumstances, would happen under the terms of my motion today.

As it happens, in 1976 the Government argued initially that they should continue to have a majority on Standing Committees simply because they had a majority over the Conservatives rather than an overall majority in the House. That was plainly not acceptable in 1976. I suspect that there was much to-ing and

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fro-ing through the usual channels and, between debating the proposition that there should be a majority regardless of the absence of an overall majority and 7 May, the dispute was resolved by a motion precisely along the lines that I propose today:

"the Committee of Selection should interpret the Standing Order so that only an overall majority in the composition of the House should guarantee a majority in each Standing Committee".

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, I hope that the hon. Lady—whatever else she may say in her speech—will explain the mystery of the apparent flat contradiction between the letter that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) wrote last week to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) and the motion on which his name appears today.

In his letter of last week, the hon. Member for Perry Barr referred to a Labour party standing order which said that, even if someone were suspended from the Whip, that Member is

"expected to comply with the Party whip, and to conform with whatever pairing arrangements apply to other members of the Party from time to time".

The letter continued:

"If the PLP at any time had Members who were suspended from the whip, it would still be quite legitimate for the Labour Party, in Parliament, to 'claim' those Members for the purposes of constructing Committees of the House".

He went on to say that unless the 1922 Committee had a similar rule—I am bound to say that it does not because, as I have said, its constitution is largely unwritten—there would be one rule for Labour party calculations in the House and another rule for Conservative calculations. Perhaps there is some simple misunderstanding—or perhaps wiser counsel has prevailed—but it would be helpful if the matter could be cleared up.

Whatever the explanation, however, the motion that I have moved represents the approach that is both sensible and right, and I commend it to the House.

4.23 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"in the opinion of this House, any Member who for disciplinary reasons has been deprived of his or her party's whip has in effect been expelled from his or her Parliamentary party and cannot logically be counted as belonging to that party for the purposes of determining the current composition of the House; and accordingly this House instructs the Committee of Selection to apply this principle in nominating Members to serve on Standing Committees in accordance with Standing Order No. 86(2).".

Labour Members have certainly enjoyed the debate so far, although I am not sure how much light the Leader of the House has shed on the issue this afternoon. I am not sure that he has told the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) how he should crawl back into subservience.

We are still intrigued to know exactly what is meant by withdrawing the Conservative Whip. If the roles were reversed and we were talking about Labour Members who had lost the Whip, it would be easy to define exactly what that meant, because the parliamentary Labour party has written rules and a constitution and we abide by them.

The Leader of the House said that he had tabled the motion because he thought that the House should decide. In fact, the decision to refer the matter to the Floor of the House was taken by the Committee of Selection; it was a unanimous all-party decision by that Committee, and that in itself demonstrates that the Committee of Selection considers that there is a problem, and that the new circumstances in which the House is working need to be examined and throw up new problems.

I start by reminding the House of the exact circumstances which have led to today's debate. It is not surprising that the Leader of the House did not spend a great deal of time on those circumstances, but it is worth reminding the House of the sequence of events.

On Monday 28 November last year, the House debated the Second Reading of the European Communities (Finance) Bill. The Prime Minister, because of fears about the scale of the Tory rebellion which was pending at that time, made that vote a vote of confidence in his Government. As it turned out, eight Conservative Members refused to support the Government on a vote of confidence and had the party Whip withdrawn. One hon. Member, the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), voluntarily resigned the Whip the next day. The motion moved by the Leader of the House leaves that hon. Gentleman in limbo, because its terms imply that hon. Members can move only to another party rather than have the independent status that he was implying could exist, but that is a minor point.

As a consequence of the decisions of that hon. Gentleman and the Conservative Whips, the number of members of the parliamentary Conservative party fell by nine. That meant that the number of Members receiving the Government Whip fell by nine and that the Government no longer enjoyed an overall majority in the House.

The figures were reported in the House of Commons Library bulletin of 2 December, which shows clearly that there are 321 Conservative Members and 269 Labour Members. There are two new categories: elected as a Conservative but has resigned the Whip, one; and elected as Conservatives but the Whip has been withdrawn, eight. Shortly after that, the position changed because after the Dudley by-election the number of Labour Members increased to 270. The change in the composition of the House following events on 28 November left the Committee of Selection having to decide what the ramifications of the new circumstances were and how it should interpret them in respect of new Standing Committees.

The Leader of the House has already mentioned that there have been other occasions on which Members on both sides of the House have had the Whip withdrawn. Indeed, there have been other occasions when Conservative Members have defied three-line Whips. When the European Communities Bill went through in 1972, the Government were defeated three times on three-line Whips because of defections on their own side, but in those circumstances no action was taken. It was somewhat unusual and unprecedented for so many Members of the Conservative party to have the Whip withdrawn on one occasion.

Now the Government have lost nine Members, which, given the relative narrowness of the Government's majority, has materially affected the balance of the House

of Commons. As the Leader of the House said, on such occasions we tend to look for precedents and he is right to say that there is no exact parallel.

As the right hon. Gentleman anticipated, I would argue that the nearest parallels are presented by events in 1951 and 1976, when Labour Governments were elected with small majorities which they lost during the ensuing Parliaments. It is interesting to note what Conservative Members said at those times. In 1951, for example, Mr. Winston Churchill, Mr. Anthony Eden, Mr. R. A. Butler and others tabled a motion when the Labour Government lost their majority, suggesting

"That a Select Committee be appointed to consider"

the relevant Standing Order

"and report what alterations are necessary to elucidate its meaning and to ensure that Standing Committees in fact reflect the composition of the House."

As all hon. Members probably know, the outcome of that was a general election soon afterwards.

In 1976—the Leader of the House has already mentioned this—a Labour Government lost their majority on the Floor of the House. On 29 April 1976, the then Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Thatcher, tabled early-day motion 351, which called on the Committee of Selection

"henceforth to appoint Members in equal numbers from the Government and the Opposition Parties."

Incidentally, that motion was signed by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, who is not present at the moment. The position was debated on the Floor of the House, and it was agreed that only an overall majority in the composition of the House should guarantee a majority on each Standing Committee.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Did that historical position arise because Labour Members who formed part of the majority were denied the Whip? Surely not; this is a different situation.

Mrs. Taylor: The situation is the same, in that a governing party with a small majority has lost that majority.

As the Leader of the House has said, we still need to ask how we should define the composition of the House. That was the difficulty that faced the Committee of Selection when it met before Christmas. The peculiarity of our constitution is that it tends to ignore the existence of political parties whenever possible, which does not make the definition of the composition of the House any easier. The points made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) are extremely relevant in this context. Registration of political parties, which has been suggested by some Opposition Members, might help, but, for reasons that have already been mentioned, the idea has always been rejected by the Conservative party.

As we debate the motion we do not know exactly what is meant by withdrawal of the Whip, which makes life very difficult. The Government argue in the motion that the circumstances that should be defined as the loss of a majority are extremely narrow: under the terms of the motion, the Government could withdraw the Whip from half the Conservative party and still claim to have a technical majority on the Floor of the House. In fact, the motion could well store up future problems for the Government, because it could be interpreted as an invitation to other potential rebels to risk a rebellion without bringing down the Government.

Mr. Kirkwood: The hon. Lady is making a powerful point. Does she agree that, although this provision may be available to the Government at a later stage in this Parliament, it also sets a precedent that will straddle Parliaments and could be used by future Governments in circumstances that the House cannot foresee today?

Mrs. Taylor: We have noticed that with some interest, but we would not intend to try to use the provision, because we are certain that one election victory does not give a Government absolute authority to do anything they like.

The Leader of the House has said outside the House and again here today that because independent Conservatives—or rebels—were elected as Conservative Members of Parliament, they should automatically be counted as Government supporters. Perhaps we should leave aside the fact that claiming the 1992 election victory as authority for anything is a bit rich coming from the Government, considering all the broken Tory taxation pledges. Be that as it may, the right hon. Gentleman is ignoring a few important facts, not least the reasons for the withdrawal of the Whip.

Sir Andrew Bowden: Surely the point is that these people were elected as Conservatives and are members of the Conservative party? They are thus part of the Conservative party.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the simple fact that they are not members of the parliamentary Conservative party; there are other important ramifications to which I shall come later.

I remind the House that the Conservative Whip has been withdrawn from certain Members because they refused to support the Prime Minister on a vote that he had made a vote of confidence. We are not talking about a minor vote or an ordinary three-line Whip. How can the Government have it both ways? If Conservative Members cannot vote for the Government on a vote of confidence which the Prime Minister said could have led to a general election, how on earth can the Government count them as part of their majority from day to day?

The fact is that nobody does that. We have only to read the press reports—Tory press reports—of the day after to know that. I have already mentioned the House Library bulletin. We know that Tory central office has been in touch with the constituency chairs of the so-called rebels. We know that it is generally thought that withdrawal of the Whip puts Conservative Members beyond the pale. Indeed the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) said before Christmas on "The World at One" that the Government should restore their majority in the House of Commons by giving the Whip back to the rebels; so he clearly believes that the Government lost their majority by withdrawing the Whip from them.

The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) went out of his way in the debate on the Christmas Adjournment to proclaim that he could no longer call the Prime Minister or the Chancellor of the Exchequer his right hon. Friend. On the VAT vote, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) said that if he had still had the Whip he would have voted with the Government, but that as he

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did not have it he would make up his own mind and take his own decision. If all the rebels thought the same, perhaps that is why most of them did not vote with the Government on VAT.

It may, of course, have been all these instances that led the Prime Minister to talk about whether the Whip should be restored to those who lost it at the end of November. Just before Christmas, on 20 December, he said:

"In due course one can consider whether"—

not when—

"they should be readmitted to the party whip . . . but it is not imminent at all. They must show that they are in the business of supporting the Government."

If their return to the fold is not imminent and if they must still show that they are in the business of supporting the Government—crawling back to subservience, as it has been described by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West—how can they be counted as part of the Government's majority when we debate these issues?

Some Ministers are not sure whether they should be taking a tough or soft line, whether they should be wooing or abusing the so-called rebels. Even the Prime Minister has changed his tune on some occasions. Despite his toughness before Christmas, we heard a slightly different tone last weekend. Perhaps that is because he wants the votes of the rebels today, or wants them in the near future. The Secretary of State for Employment has said all along that he hopes to have the rebels back in the fold soon. He is adopting the gently, gently approach. That may be because he agreed with them at heart. It may be also because one day he may need their votes in a leadership election. One of the consequences of withdrawal of the Conservative Whip is that if there is a leadership election, those Members who do not have the Whip will not be able to take part in it.

Mr. Dixon: My hon. Friend's argument is extremely relevant. Is she aware that when the Committee of Selection met on the Wednesday at 4.15 pm to determine whether the rebels were still Conservative Members—that is what the Government were arguing—nominations for leadership of the 1922 Committee had finished at 12 noon? If the Committee of Selection had met the night before, would the Government have been claiming that the rebels were Conservative Members? They could well have submitted counter-nominations.

Mrs. Taylor: I understand that one member of the parliamentary Conservative party said today that he regarded the withdrawal of the Whip not as a disciplinary decision but as a political one. Perhaps that is what those concerned had in mind.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Lady's arguments. She lacks one crucial piece of evidence in securing the conviction that she seeks. Will she say what evidence she has that any one of my nine hon. Friends of whom she has been speaking has declared that he or she does not support the Government? We cannot rely on the House of Commons bulletin and the person who compiles it. Does the compiler determine the composition of the House? If so, who is it?

Mrs. Taylor: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman might mean by evidence that the rebels do not support the Government. Surely not voting for one's Prime Minister in a vote of confidence is pretty clear evidence that one does not support the Government.

I return to the central point that the Leader of the House made when he talked about the composition of the House being determined by the electorate in a general election. Opposition Members all live in the hope that if a general election were to be called today, tomorrow or next week, the rebel Members—the independent Conservative Members—would not be eligible to stand as parliamentary candidates in that election. It might be that they would stand as Conservative independents. They could stand as parliamentary candidates but not as official Conservative parliamentary candidates. The Leader of the House has confirmed that in our discussions.

Mr. Budgen: The issue is shrouded in some mystery. The answer depends on whether the Members concerned were selected by a Conservative association and whether that association was then expelled from the national union. The constitution of the Conservative party is as shrouded in mystery as the constitution of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Taylor: I agree with the hon. Gentleman in one respect, and that is that many of these issues are shrouded in mystery. Every time a Conservative Member intervenes to clarify an issue, the waters are even more muddied.

It might be helpful to the House and to the country if correspondence and reports of telephone calls between Conservative central office and individual Conservative parties were placed in the Library, which would enable us all to have the full information. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) has made public some interpretations of the Conservative constitution which have been given to her. As the Leader of the House has said, however, all these matters are extremely vague. That does not help us. Some of those who have had the Conservative Whip withdrawn have been told that until the Whip is restored, if it is, they will not be able to stand as official Conservative candidates.

It may be that some Conservative Members would consider that an advantage. Some of them who are now in their places might think that their chances would be enhanced if they stood as independent Conservatives rather than official Conservatives come the next election. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) made it clear in a television interview that he is not concerned whether he stands as an official Conservative candidate or an independent one. I am sure that the House is aware that the hon. Member for Billericay is similarly not concerned. She stood as an independent candidate against an official Conservative candidate in 1974.

If the rebels are not eligible to stand as official Conservative party candidates, how can the House consider them to be eligible to be part of the Government's majority today? The real problem is that the Government have been in office for too long. They have been in office for so long that they think that they can get away with anything, both with their own Members and with the country. The truth is that the Prime Minister

has lost his authority in his party within the House. It is only a matter of time before the country has the opportunity to pass its verdict.

4.47 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): This is a short debate and I shall try not to make a long speech.

I wish to pay tribute to the members of the Committee of Selection. I think that all nine of us would agree that it is a pleasant Committee. Nevertheless, we have our arguments. When I first became a member of the Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) was the Chairman. That was in the halcyon days when the Government had an enormous majority. With his usual impeccable timing, my hon. Friend moved on to fresh fields and pastures new and left me to hold the baby, when the Government had a small majority. I pay tribute to the members of the Committee because our arguments are always conducted in a civilised way. There have been no instances of anyone being unpleasant or descending to personalities.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was incorrect when she said that no agreement had been reached by the Committee. We reached a decision on a vote. It was because of that that the Opposition members of the Committee felt that the matter should be referred to the House. I did not dissent because I thought that if we could not reach a proper agreement in Committee, the matter should be decided by the House itself. At the same time, I am sorry that the issue has had to come to the Floor of the House. The Committee decided before the vote took place that the matter should be referred to the usual channels. A meeting was deferred for a week so that that could happen. Over the years, the usual channels have done a tremendous job in sorting out extremely difficult issues.

The speech of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was constantly interrupted. He showed enormous patience. It is difficult to make a speech when one is being constantly deflected. I pay tribute to him. Many Leaders of the House would not have given way as often as my right hon. Friend did.

The motion is perfectly fair and deserves support. The problem arose because nine of my hon. Friends no longer have the Conservative Whip. As a consequence, the Committee of Selection had to decide whether they should be counted as Conservative Members or, when we decide the party proportions on Committees, whether they should go under the umbrella of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), the Chief Whip of the Liberal party who looks after the minority parties. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman because he consults the other parties fully before any nominations are made on behalf of the minority parties.

My nine hon. Friends continue to sit on the Conservative Benches. That is an important point. They have repeatedly stressed that they are Conservatives and that they support Conservative principles. Therefore, I believe that—this is the point that I made in Committee—they should be treated as such.

Mr. Hoon: When the Committee of Selection has considered similar problems, has there ever been an occasion on which an hon. Member leaving a political party to sit as an independent has been treated as a member of another party, which is a subject of the motion of the Leader of the House?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: I am sorry, but I cannot give an answer to that. I was going to use as my precedent what happened in 1976, which is something to which the hon. Member for Dewsbury also referred. At that time, Hugh Delargy was Chairman of the Committee of Selection, and the Labour Government had lost their majority. That was the simple fact. A debate took place, in which Mr. Delargy said:

"The Labour Party has a majority of 39 over the Conservatives. Most of the other 40 or so hon. Members belong to four political parties. They are independent parties with their own Leader, their own Whips and, more importantly, their own policies. They are the Liberals, the Scottish National Party, the United Ulster Unionist coalition and Plaid Cymru. There is also the SDLP of Northern Ireland. None of these parties was elected to support the Conservative Party in this House. They were not elected primarily to oppose the Labour Party. They were elected for positive reasons—to pursue certain policies and to serve their electorates."—[*Official Report*, 3 May 1976; Vol. 910, c. 984.

One can switch that argument around. Today, there are 60 more Conservative than Labour Members of Parliament. There are 23 Liberal Democrats and 24 other hon. Members who represent six different parties. I maintain that those Liberals and Members for the minority parties were not elected to support the Labour party today. They were not elected to oppose the Conservative party, to use the analogy that Hugh Delargy used then.

On 6 April 1976, the then Labour Government lost their overall majority, because of the death of Brian O'Malley, the Labour Member of Parliament for Rotherham. I think that there was parity at that time. The following day, John Stonehouse crossed the Floor of the House. His clothes were found on a beach in Florida and he turned up in Australia. He must have been a very strong swimmer. The point is that the Government's majority dropped to zero after the death of Brian O'Malley, and with the defection of John Stonehouse the Government had a minority.

Later in 1976, as I am sure that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will recall, the Labour Government lost other by-elections. There was also the defection of James Sillars and John Robertson, who left the Labour party to form what was called the "Scottish Labour party". That, of course, increased the deficit that the Labour Government had.

The situation today is very different from that in 1976. I disagree with the hon. Member for Dewsbury, because the problems in 1976 were caused as a result of by-election losses and because three hon. Members, who were elected as Labour Members in October 1974, became increasingly disenchanted with that party and crossed the Floor of the House. We voted on 3 May 1976 on whether the Labour Government should keep a majority on all Committees even though they had lost their majority in the House. The argument arose because Mr. Delargy gave his casting vote in the Committee of Selection to say that the Labour Government should keep a majority of one.

Mr. Dixon *indicated assent.*

Sir Fergus Montgomery: I see that the hon. Gentleman is nodding.

I maintain that we had a majority on the Floor of the House. The point that I am making is that the Government had lost their majority. I found it quite amusing that the

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hon. Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)—he has not spoken yet, but has sent a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley—voted that day for the Labour Government to keep a majority of one on all Standing Committees, yet tonight they are putting up entirely different arguments.

The present Government have lost four seats in by-elections, and that has reduced our overall majority. My nine hon. Friends have shown no inclination at all to cross the Floor of the House. They have not wanted to join any other party. They have maintained repeatedly that they are still Conservatives. I hope that tonight, when we vote on the motion, they will support the Government.

4.55 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) has played a very distinguished role as Chairman of the Committee of Selection. He has, largely through his own personal qualities, managed to keep the argument on an even keel in terms of the personalities involved. The Committee of Selection was clearly in a difficult position, and he was quite right to take the decision, supported by his colleagues on the Committee, to bring the matter to the Floor of the House. The Committee could have used its majority to railroad just about anything through, but if it had done so it would have ruined the relationship that is essential for the Committee to work properly. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman.

I watched the Leader of the House carefully and have not seen him look quite as uncomfortable at the Dispatch Box for some time. He made a speech, but I do not think that he was particularly committed to the merits of the case that he was seeking to establish. I say that because the motion is designed to cover the Government's embarrassment. It was not the right hon. Gentleman's fault, as it was not his decision; it was taken in other parts of the Government.

The Government are trying to make the best of a bad job. Politically, they are trying to have their cake and eat it. They cast nine of their Members into the wilderness, yet they are trying to maintain them as part of their number for the purposes of the Committee of Selection. The two things are entirely incompatible.

I have a clear view about the relationship between any Member of Parliament and his or her political group. A simple analogy is that of contract law, under which there must be consensus between both parties before an agreement can be struck. An hon. Member must say that he or she is willing to be associated with a parliamentary group and, equally important, the grouping in turn must associate itself with that Member. Those two parts of the bargain are essential before consensus is possible. It seems quite impossible to argue that somebody can be considered as a member of a parliamentary grouping without those two essential parts of the bargain being struck and without consensus being achieved. If that is true, it is impossible for one part of that bargain to be withdrawn unilaterally and the situation to remain the same. It seems inconsistent to argue otherwise.

The motion is bad because it establishes a bad precedent. I listened to the valuable speech made from the Labour Front Bench by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). I made the point to her in an intervention—I hold it to be true—that the House will invariably return to this precedent, but goodness knows when and in what context. We have trawled over some of the precedents of 1974 and before that. One day, this motion and the action that the Government take will be used in circumstances that we cannot foresee and in a way that is wholly bad practice. It could be used by others in a future Government, such as the hon. Lady, to disfranchise the left wing of the parliamentary Labour party, which would be equally as wrong as the Government's approach to the motion.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman refers to the absence of precedent. I advert to the fact that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) made no comment on what we have been told by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) are the standing orders of the Labour party—that the removal of the Whip makes no difference in the Labour party. Therefore, my motion is effectively the same as the standing orders of the Labour party.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Leader of the House is looking in the wrong direction if he expects me to defend the official Opposition. I have enough trouble trying to defend the Ulster Unionists, the nationalist parties and the others as the shop steward for the minority parties. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) is big enough and long enough in the tooth to be able to answer for himself.

I want to make two quick points in the remainder of the time available to me. Despite the assurances that the Leader of the House gave to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) and others—I shall read *Hansard* carefully tomorrow—unless there are changes in the practical way of working that until now the Committee of Selection has adopted, I do not think that he can deliver that promise.

The only member of the Committee of Selection who invariably is obliged because of his position to offer alternatives for consideration for the make-up of Standing Committees is myself. By definition, I am supposed to look after and try to reconcile the conflicts between the other minority parties and my own. Members of the Committee will confirm that from time to time I will announce to it that I have had bids that I have not been able to resolve by bilateral discussions from the minority parties for positions on Standing Committees. If I cannot reconcile them, the obvious commonsense method of proceeding is for me to go to the Committee of Selection and for the Committee, using its powers under the Standing Orders, to make that decision, as it is entitled to do.

The other two main parties exercise their discretion, perfectly properly under Standing Order No. 86(2), in assessing the composition of the House and the qualification for membership of the Standing Committees before they come to the Committee of Selection. Otherwise we would all be arguing about one another's suggested members. Invariably what happens in the Committee of Selection is that names are proffered and accepted without argument and the only member of the Committee of Selection who offers alternatives at the moment is me.

The only way in which the Leader of the House can deliver the promise that he has just given to the nine rebels is to give them a guarantee, which would have to be implemented by one of the members of the Committee of Selection, that any competing bids that were made by the nine Members referred to in the motion will be reported to the Conservative Whips office and that those bids, if they have not been reconciled by discussion, will be reported by somebody to the Committee of Selection so that it knows that some of those nine Members have made an application to be considered. It has no other means of knowing. No machinery exists at the moment for doing that. Therefore, unless procedures change, it is impossible for that fact to be made known to the Committee of Selection.

The Leader of the House will correct me if I am putting words in his mouth, but I understand that he will now make sure that any bids made by any of the nine Members whom we are debating this evening that are turned down and not automatically accepted and recommended by the Conservative members of the Committee of Selection will be separately announced so that the Committee of Selection will know that they have asked to sit on a Standing Committee but have not been included in the Conservative numbers. That procedure would be new, but it is the only way in which the Leader of the House can deliver the undertakings that he gave earlier this evening.

I can tell the Leader of the House why I believe that to be so. There is some confusion about it and I do not want to make too much of it, but it is my clear recollection that when the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) was absent for the Maastricht vote he was disfranchised in exactly the same way as the nine Members whom we are debating this evening. He had, prima facie, a good case to be considered for the Standing Committee that considered the Intelligence Services Act 1994. At that time he did not have the benefit of being in receipt of the Conservative party Whip, so the matter arrived in my bailiwick in the Committee of Selection. I proposed two names: my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), who represents GCHQ and so had a proper reason to be considered for that Standing Committee, and the hon. Member for Torbay. The decision was taken in a perfectly competent way by the Committee of Selection.

Perhaps that should not have happened; I may not have had the necessary authority. I did not speak to the hon. Member for Torbay; I was simply told by someone that it would be the proper thing to do. I did not want to take any chance of his not being considered, so as a failsafe fall-back position I decided to make that recommendation. As usual with the minority parties, I put two alternative names forward and one was preferred over the other.

That is my clear recollection of what happened to a Conservative Member who had no Whip. No Conservative members of the Committee of Selection demurred and said that I was not entitled to do that because the hon. Member for Torbay was in some strange way still a member of the Conservative party. That nomination was put forward, it was considered and it was rejected because the claim of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham was considered to be superior. Therefore, there is a clear precedent, which the Government conveniently seek to gloss over and forget in a way that is neither sensible nor fair.

The motion is a pretty tawdry little attempt to try to clean up a bit of difficulty into which the Government have got themselves. The House of Commons should have nothing to do with helping them out of the hole into which they have dug themselves.

5.6 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I do not usually have the immediate presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) on these Benches, but I am delighted that that is the situation this evening because I should like to pay tribute to him as Chairman of the Committee of Selection. The Committee does a tremendous and unsung task for the House. It is a good example of where this place properly has the property of aggressive rhetoric, but behind it there is a great deal of constructive work of consensual politics, without which this place could not operate. Occasionally the Committee is placed in great difficulty and it invites the advice of the House—usually in circumstances where its advice is rather less than wholly detached.

I have always assumed that the crucial task of the Committee of Selection is to ensure that the Government's business can be carried through, not wholly on the Government's terms. One of the crucial aspects of the work of the Committee of Selection is its arm's-length relationship with the Government—arm's length, but, none the less, it must still be touching. One accepts that.

If a Government have a whisker majority, as the Government of February 1974 did, the matter is relatively easy for the Committee of Selection: it provides for a Government in a minority. The difficulty arises in the circumstances that we now have and which we had in 1976 when a Government lose their overall majority but effectively, on day-to-day operations, they retain a majority. They can still claim to have the legislative authority to conduct the Queen's Speech, and usually the wisdom not to draft that Queen's Speech so that they cannot obtain a Second Reading for Bills. That is the present situation.

This is a rather grubby, practical problem. I say that because these are good-natured occasions but for a moment we must come back to that one reality. The problem that confronts the Committee of Selection, which it would like resolved by this cathartic experience this evening, is how to secure a Committee structure that will enable the Government, having secured the Second Reading for a Bill, to proceed with it through its subsequent parliamentary stages.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has suggested one formula, and my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) have suggested another. They say that they quite understand that if a Bill receives a Second Reading the Committee of Selection must propose a Standing Committee that can reasonably reflect the view that the House took on Second Reading. To my mind, that idea was made in a constructive and thoughtful fashion.

My hon. Friends were attempting to disengage the House from a difficulty that is almost inevitably of a temporary nature. A Parliament in which one party has a majority but not an overall majority cannot be one that will last more than a couple of years or so. We know the terminal date of this Parliament, so we are talking about a period of roughly two years at the very longest. My hon. Friends have suggested a solution that I am sure will be

[Mr. John Biffen]

studied, although it will to some extent be rejected by the perfectionists, who will feel that the standard formula applying to the construction of Standing Committees is much to be preferred to the pick-and-choose basis suggested by my hon. Friends.

The debate, however, has shown us that this is a great occasion of imperfections. My hon. Friends need not be too distressed about what they have done as a piece of private enterprise; although it is imperfect it is an attempt to meet a central difficulty for the House, on an admittedly temporary basis for this Parliament.

I believe that my hon. Friends have made a helpful suggestion, and I hope that it will not only unite sentiment on the Government side of the House but will appeal to Opposition Members, who will also realise that this is a House of Commons problem. Admittedly, it occurs only once every 20 years or so—thanks be for that—but when it does it requires a more constructive response than an exchange of good-natured but hysterical party political polemic.

The speech that has dominated this evening's proceedings is that delivered by the Leader of the House who, with characteristic courtesy, tried to thread his way through a thicket of difficulties in defining what a Member without a Whip is for the purposes of law making—a crucial element of House of Commons procedure. Like everyone who has had any connection with the usual channels, my right hon. Friend knows that a seamless robe of difficulties flows from certain decisions concerning legislation, which are then applied to accommodation and then to the provision of assistance via the so-called Short money. The whole business is a nightmare, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his courage and stamina in approaching it.

When my right hon. Friend's speech was all over, however, I thought that my ideal reply would have been, "Wouldn't it be easier to restore the Whip?" Presumably we are in a situation of graduated response, but Home Office issues have been batted to and fro in the House over the past few days to such an extent that I still feel quite unable to deal with questions of parliamentary discipline and the remedial consequences of a certain dose of custodial treatment.

I am now beguiled by the thought of the Chief Whip hearing a tap on his door and opening it to find my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) in a penitent sheet, waving a sheaf of architectural plans for the renovation of his office. I hope, if not pray, for that deliverance, but somehow I feel that it will not come. Therefore, I look to the Leader of the House, in the light of whatever vote takes place, to bear it in mind as we proceed from here that there cannot be a full restoration of Conservative fortunes and fighting ability until we resolve the miserable business of the whipless nine and the powerful degree of support that they enjoy in the country.

5.14 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I shall speak briefly to explode two myths, one about the way in which the Committee of Selection works and the other about what the Leader of the House has said about the way in which the Labour party withdraws the Whip. I hope that the Tory rebels will listen attentively.

Before I explain, I shall congratulate the Chairman of the Committee of Selection on the good job that he does. We try to work together as cordially as possible, but tonight the minority parties have been spoken about as if they were on the Labour side. I remind Conservative Members that a minority party, the Ulster Unionist party, saved the Government's bacon by voting with them on a European finance Bill and preventing a general election. I put that on the record straight away.

For the benefit of the Tory rebels, I shall explain Labour party standing orders, and how the Whip is withdrawn from a Labour Member. First, the person concerned is interviewed by the Chief Whip and Deputy Chief Whip and asked for an explanation of his or her actions. If the Chief Whip is not satisfied with the explanation given, he then reports to the shadow Cabinet. If the shadow Cabinet is not satisfied and agrees, it submits a motion to a special meeting of the parliamentary Labour party, where there is a full discussion and every Labour Member of Parliament has the opportunity to vote on whether the Whip should be withdrawn.

The Leader of the House seems to want to cite what we do, but the best thing that he could do would be to take our standing orders back to the 1922 Committee. If he did, the Tory party would look a lot better than it does now.

I have pointed out to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who made a great case in her speech, that when the Committee of Selection met at a quarter past 4 on the Wednesday, the nominations for the leadership at the 1922 Committee having closed at midday that day, the Government claimed that the rebels who had had the Whip withdrawn were still Conservative Members. I asked whether, if the Committee had met the previous night, before the nominations for the leadership closed, the Government would have claimed that those people were still Conservative Members. If they were, they could have gone to the 1922 Committee and assembled the number of names required for a stalking horse in the leadership election.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): As we are talking about Labour party politics, will the hon. Gentleman explain what would happen if the Leader of the Opposition took one view on whether the Whip should be withdrawn and the parliamentary party took another? Who would prevail?

Mr. Dixon: The vote would be taken at a special meeting of the parliamentary Labour party and the majority would decide, whatever the leader of the Labour party or anyone else wanted. I think that that is a good system, and I hope that when the Tory rebels have the Whip restored they will go to the 1922 Committee and try to have its standing orders changed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury mentioned official Conservative candidates. May I ask the Leader of the House what would happen if the rebellion by the nine—or the eight—Members led to the Government's being defeated on a confidence motion and a general election followed? Would those nine or eight Members be official Tory candidates in the election caused by their having defied the Tory Whip? That question has been asked and the Leader of the House has not given an explanation.

I shall now explode the other myth that has grown over the years concerning the way in which the Committee of Selection works. Invariably, when we meet on a

Wednesday a motion is on the Order Paper to set up a Standing Committee to consider a Bill that has received a Second Reading. The Chairman of the Committee of Selection proposes the Conservative names, which are never queried by the Labour or Liberal members of the Committee of Selection. The Labour names are proposed by me or my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and are never queried by the Government or the Liberal party. When the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) proposes the minority party names, they are left primarily to him. That is how a Standing Committee is selected.

Where the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) gets the Conservative names from, I do not know, but I have a good suspicion. I have no doubt that the Government and Conservative Members know where he gets the names from. I remind hon. Members that we are not talking about Select Committees. A Select Committee is appointed by the House of Commons. When a name is proposed to the Committee of Selection it is then put to the House and hon. Members can object. Indeed, if hon. Members continue to object, there has to be a debate and vote on the Floor of the House.

Standing Committees fall into a different category. Once the Committee of Selection announces the names, no one can object. If a person is taken off a Standing Committee or is not put on it, no one can veto the decision of the Committee of Selection.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: I would much rather have volunteers on Standing Committees. Conservative Members sometimes write to me to say that they would like to be considered to serve on a particular Standing Committee. It is much better for someone who has an interest in the Bill to serve as a volunteer than to drag people on to Committees.

Mr. Dixon: I do not know where the Chairman of the Committee of Selection gets the names from, but they are never queried and Members never object to them.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was right when he said that the Government directed the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) to him to try for one of the minority party places when the hon. Gentleman had the Whip withdrawn and wanted to become a member of the Committee that considered the Intelligence Services Bill. How on earth can the Government claim that the nine Conservative Members who have lost the Whip should continue to be regarded as Conservative Members? Those nine Members do not have a chance to be selected to serve on a Standing Committee.

I put a question to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection: what would happen if the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) wanted to serve on the Finance Bill Committee? I know that he has an interest in finance. Would he be a Government nominee? I doubt it very much. The Committee of Selection works by selecting Committees to reflect representation on the Floor of the House. It is done on a mathematical basis. The Government claim that they have 330 Members. The Opposition have 270 and the others have 47.

The Labour party will not gain from the nine Conservative Members no longer being treated as members of the Tory party. We will still have the same number of members on a Standing Committee. Those who will gain are those dealt with by the Liberal Chief Whip. This is not a case of the Labour party wanting to dominate the Standing Committees. The people who will benefit are not only the nine members of the Conservative party who have lost or resigned the Whip but the 47 others represented by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire.

There has been some argument in the Committee of Selection and on the Floor of the House. The Leader of the House has not answered the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury. When is a Conservative Member of Parliament not a Conservative Member of Parliament? We say that it is when he does not have the Conservative Whip. Those nine Members are now in no man's land. They have no representation on any Committee because they are selected through the usual channels. Those Members cannot go to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, so they have no say. They are doubly penalised by the Government. They have had the Whip taken away from them. They are no longer members of the 1922 Committee. They will not be able to serve on any Standing Committee as a result of today's motion.

5.24 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): There is a saying that if we legislate or pass a motion in haste, we repent at leisure. I am sympathetic to what the Government are trying to achieve in the motion. It has two aspects—the short term and the long term. As is usual in such cases, the long-term issue is more important than the short-term issue. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has told the House that he will not, through the usual channels, seek to veto the ambitions of my eight colleagues and myself to be selected to serve on Standing Committees. Certain colleagues have said that that means that we will be treated in exactly the same way as any other Conservative Member. I am not sure that that is precisely what my right hon. Friend said.

Let us move on and consider the long-term issues. The motion seeks to perfect the Standing Orders of the House as they apply to the Committee of Selection. If we pass the motion today, it will guide the Committee of Selection for the indefinite future. I accept, and I believe that everyone would accept, that if the House gives a Bill a Second Reading, that is the will of the House. The House and any sensible person would wish and everyone would expect the Standing Committee to have a majority which would support the principles of the Bill so that it could progress through the Standing Committee stage. That is accepted and understood.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) was generous and kind about the amendment that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) have tabled. We have tried to achieve the principle that I have outlined. I accept that the drafting is amateur, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House understands the principle behind it. I am sure that my right hon. Friend, with his superior skills and resources, could table an amendment that would give effect to the principle that we seek to achieve.

What worries me is that the motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on behalf of the Government goes further than necessary. It has long-term implications. My right hon. Friend is an honourable and scrupulous Leader of the House. If he gives an undertaking, we all accept it and expect that he will

[Mr. Tony Marlow]

behave honourably. However, with the best will in the world, my right hon. Friend will not be there for ever. There could at some stage be a change. Someone else could take his position. There could be a change in Government. The motion will still be there. The House will have voted for the motion.

The motion means that if an hon. Member leaves the Government party or is forced from the Government party, short of that hon. Member joining another party, he will still count as part of the Government tally when Committee places are allocated. He may become a political untouchable. The usual channels may obstruct his ability to pursue his constituents' interests. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House would not do that, but under different management and leadership it could happen. If it happened, the hon. Member would not have the same ability to pursue his constituents' interests as other Members of Parliament.

Such an hon. Member could be adversely affected, but the Government would not be. Where it mattered, the Government would be safeguarded, but where it mattered to the hon. Member, he could be undermined and less able effectively to pursue his constituents' interests. At the very least, that is unfair and against natural justice. More important, it would enhance the power, prestige and influence available to the friendly gestapo in the Whips Office. That is at the expense of the individual and, more particularly, the individualistic Member of Parliament.

Surely, in this cradle of democracy, if we are to change the balance of power between the authorities, the establishment and the Back Benches, we wish to move that power towards the Back Benches, not towards the establishment.

The motion effectively states that, once elected as a member of the Government party—in this instance the Conservative party—despite any damascene conversion that an hon. Member might undergo, and one's views on policy might change by 180 per cent., as long as one does not join another party, even a one-man independent party, one will be counted as a member of that party for the Government's convenience. In the long term, that cannot be right. It might be right while we are under the jurisdiction of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, but in principle it seems very wrong.

Those of us who were elected as official Conservatives at the last election know that if we had not stood as such candidates we would be most unlikely to be here. Having been elected, we are, as the Prime Minister says, very true blue Conservatives. By and large, we want to support the Government more than many of our colleagues.

The procedure suggested in the motion is tantamount to some of the principles that underlie proportional representation. For House of Commons purposes, the motion implies that a party as a whole is elected, not an accumulation of individual Members of Parliament, representing individual constituencies, with individual consciences, eccentricities and, perhaps, changing policy priorities. I was not aware that the Conservative party had embraced the radical proportional representation position of the Liberal party, but this motion seems to imply just that. I caution my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to look at the motion from that point of view.

I respect and accept the objectives of the Government motion, but I am concerned about its detail and its long-term implications. I invite all hon. Members to consider carefully those implications because, although they may not visualise them at the moment, there could be times when the motion will affect them and their power to act in their constituents' interests. A short-term solution may be needed but, as ever, there seem to be uncovenanted long-term implications.

5.31 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) invited us to consider the implications of the motion. I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could consider one aspect of the matter that has not yet been touched upon—the representation by this House in the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. At present, this country has 18 full and 18 alternate members. The Government have 10 full and nine alternate members, the minor parties have one full and one alternate member, and the Labour party has seven full and eight alternate members. The proportion was generous to the Government at the time of the 1992 general election. Since then, they have lost seats and, with the removal of the Whip from nine Conservative Members, they do not command half the membership of the House, which would justify occupancy of 18 of the 36 places, but merely 321 Members. The Government are, therefore, grossly over-represented.

I do not believe that I should challenge the credentials of the British delegation in Strasbourg in January on the ground that the Conservative party is grossly over-represented. I would certainly be prepared to do so, however, and have done so before over another issue, as the Leader of the House will recall. The fact remains that, if this situation continues, we are entitled to challenge the number of seats that the British Conservative party occupies. We would be challenging the largest delegation to that parliamentary assembly and it might well mean that the other Conservative parties that form the Conservative group will wonder why a party that occupies less than half the seats in its national Parliament should have more than half the seats—certainly more than half the full members' seats—allotted to its delegation. The other Conservative parties might well start to question why the British Conservative party takes seven eighths of the chairmanships and vice-chairmanships that accrue to their political group. There are a lot of implications and it might be wise for the Leader of the House to pay attention to that aspect.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): It would also be in the Government's interests to reduce that gross over-representation for pairing purposes.

Mr. Hardy: That may be the case, although we did not go away quite as often as usual last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) will recall. He might also like to know that the situation cost some of us a great deal of sleep as well.

Even before the removal of the Whip from nine of its Members, the Conservative party might have been taking an excessive share. If the present situation still applies at the end of January, when the Council of Europe assembly next meets, the Leader of the House must not be surprised to find that the position is challenged in Strasbourg.

5.34 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (Norfolk, South): In view of the time, I shall endeavour to be brief. I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) as Chairman of the Committee of Selection, which is largely unpraised in public, although it is very deserving of praise. I understood him to say that this matter had come to the Floor of the House largely as a result of Opposition pressure. I listened carefully, therefore, to what the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said when she tried to establish a case for changing our procedures for the composition of Standing Committees. She did not make her case, or deal with the central issue. I notice that she did not reply to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House when he asked her to explain the position that her hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) took in a recent letter to the Chairman of the Committee of Selection. If that was his position and the Labour party is changing its position now, it merely demonstrates the hollowness and the hypocritical nature of the debate that they are trying to have here today. If the hon. Gentleman rejects the position that he put forward a week ago, it demonstrates yet another example of the Labour Front-Bench team changing its position within a week, a day, or sometimes an hour, as was the case with value added tax on school fees.

The hon. Lady made a number of extraneous digs that had nothing to do with the debate and I assumed, therefore, that that was the purpose of this exercise. The only issue is what constitutes the composition of the House when considering nominations to Standing Committees. The precedents seem clear and I do not need to refer to them in detail as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale did so—especially the 1976 precedent. The hon. Member for Dewsbury also mentioned that, but she did not make a case for any change from the 1976 position, which was to establish that, if the majority party loses its majority through by-elections, or the declared departure of sufficient Members, and if they subsequently join or establish other parties, that constitutes the loss of a majority. That has patently not happened in this case, which is why my right hon. Friend's motion, which he tabled to clarify the position, seems right and should be supported.

It is not merely a case of apparently leaving an official whipped position. The Member concerned has clearly to indicate that he has crossed the Floor of the House and established another party as Mr. Stonehouse did. It must be clearly established in Parliament and in our constituencies that the Member concerned has ceased to be a member of the party. That is the clear and simple issue that is under consideration.

The party Whip does not enter into it. I believe that, in this context, "Erskine May" does not refer to whipping or to party arrangements of that sort. We are all familiar with the occasions on which Members ignore the Whip and vote against their party on certain issues. That vote and that rejection of the Whip does not constitute a change of party, or a change in the composition of the House.

On the argument by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), I do not think that the position of Members who no longer have the Whip is affected by this issue. I do not think that it affects their responsibilities as Members of Parliament, or their ability to pursue Members' interests. I do not really have time to give way, but I shall do so if the hon. Gentleman is brief.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry, North-West): The right hon. Gentleman's argument is tantamount to the point made by the shadow Leader of the House in her opening remarks—that if the Whip were removed from 100 Conservative Members, it would not change anything either. That is the most absurd proposition that I have heard during this debate.

Mr. MacGregor: I am coming to the membership of the party, but I must make it clear that the question of the Whip does not enter into the matter—*[Interruption.]* May I pursue my argument about the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North? All that we are discussing is the opportunity to serve as a member of a Standing Committee on a particular Bill. It is inevitable that, given the large number of members in a majority party, many hon. Members who wish to serve on a Standing Committee are prevented from doing so because, physically, they simply cannot all be on it.

So my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North is not on as strong a point as he thinks because this matter does not affect his role as a Member of Parliament representing his constituents, nor would it be fair to say that an hon. Member who leaves the party Whip or establishes a separate party of his own should have preference in selecting the Standing Committee of his choice. Indeed, as my hon. Friend will confirm, he would not have that preference if he were part of a small minority party. So that is not the central issue. The central issue is how the composition of the House is established and whether it is right that that should be reflected in Standing Committee membership.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) referred to amendment (d). He would be the first to acknowledge that that is a minefield—he said himself that it is an extraordinarily difficult area. The danger of considering an issue such as the recommendation in amendment (d) is that it represents a radical departure from all precedents. On such an issue, one must be extremely careful before going for a radical departure.

I suggest to former Leaders of the House that a moment's thought reveals real difficulties in the amendment. How do we define "interests and groupings"? While individual hon. Members may be prepared to support a Second Reading, they may feel passionately about individual aspects of a Bill. Do they therefore have an undue position in relation to the selection of the Standing Committee? Does not that give that representative interest an undue ability to change the composition of the Bill in Standing Committee?

I do not have time to go into some of the other aspects.

Mr. Gill: Following what my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said, does not the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the motion adds to the power of the Executive? Anything that adds to the power of the Executive risks reducing the power of Back Benchers as a consequence.

Mr. MacGregor: The point that I was making was that the amendment contains many difficulties that would not necessarily be in the interests of the House as a whole.

[Mr. MacGregor]

Many definitions would have to be established, which may give undue influence to particular interests or groupings. On the power of the Executive, the motion follows the established practice of the House and does not, therefore, add to the Executive's power.

Finally, may I answer the point raised by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson). In accordance with established practice and in so far as it applies in this case, as far as I am aware none of my hon. Friends to whom the Opposition have drawn attention have declared that they no longer support the Conservative party or the broad generality of its legislative programme; nor have they proclaimed that they belong to a wholly different party or severed themselves from their local Conservative associations, and they have made that clear to their association members and electors. On the contrary, they have made it clear that they continue to support the Conservative party.

That is the relevant point in relation to the composition of the House. It is the point which the motion addresses and why I support it.

5.43 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I shall be brief, as another hon. Member wishes to speak before the debate is wound up.

It appears that the Government, particularly the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House, have changed their opinions since 29 November last year. When my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) asked the Prime Minister to

"confirm reports that the President of the Board of Trade is looking again at the privatisation of the Post Office",

the Prime Minister replied:

"The hon. Lady should not be in any doubt that we think that the right decision, when we have a majority in the House, will be to privatise the Post Office."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1076.]

We recognise that the Government do not have a majority in the House at present.

As a member of the Committee of Selection for a number of years who has served under the excellent chairmanship of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), I am glad to have a debate of this nature, so that hon. Members realise what work the Committee undertakes, and the number of Committees that it sets up. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) about the functioning of that Committee and the cordial manner in which we conduct our business, although there are often great differences between its members.

I am concerned about the Government's double standards. I have great sympathy with some of the hon. Members who have had the Whip suspended, as I well understand their beliefs and the stance that they have taken. Whether it was a vote of confidence in the Government or not, they were prepared to stand by their principles and standards, and vote against the Government.

I am surprised, however, at the ensuing arrogance by the Government. Immediately those hon. Members voted against them on principle, they decided to suspend the Conservative Whip. The next day, they tried to persuade the Committee of Selection that, because of the numerical strength of the Conservative party in the House, they had the right to retain their representation on Committees. I doubt whether the Government expect the House to agree that they should have such double standards.

Only six days later, we debated on the Floor of the House the extension of VAT on fuel. I know what happened in the vote, because, as the pairing Whip, I can look at the vote every night and see who voted for and against. Those Tories who voted to defeat the Government on that issue were not necessarily the hon. Members who had had the Whip suspended. Why, then, do the Government have double standards and take the Whip from some but not from others? The basic principle was the same, yet the Government did not take the Tory Whip away from hon. Members on that occasion.

I admire the way in which my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House prepared and presented her case, because it covered all the points discussed by the Committee of Selection, but I am still concerned that we have not yet had a reply from the Leader of the House—I do not know whether we shall have one—about how he will place the suspended Members on those Committees. I agree with others who have expressed their concern about whether the precedent which we may be swayed to accept tonight will be extended to all other Governments and procedures in the future, and whether hon. Members who might have the Whip suspended can retain their Committee membership.

The list that I have before me shows all Committee members until 16 December 1994. On a Committee of a round figure of nine, which is the same number of members as the Committee of Selection, there would be five Conservatives, four Labour members and one independent or minority party member. Once the Whip has been taken from some Tory Members, on a Committee of nine there would be four Conservatives, four Labour members and one other. In effect, it would mean that the Committee would not be controlled by the Government.

We must understand the Government's motive in ensuring that they retain their numerical strength on Committees. If the Committees were reduced in size, they would become a minority Government, and would have to accept that they could not put all those hon. Members on the Committee. The important issue is the numerical strength of all the Committees. The Leader of the House knows that it is not a question of principles. The principles are involved, however, for those Members who have had the Whip withdrawn, because if they are not careful, as a result of a decision tonight they may be denied any possibility of being retained on Committees, other than Select Committees, which are not the issue tonight.

Those Members would be well advised to join the Labour party in the Lobby in support of the amendment, which would ensure that Parliament does not have to subscribe to a decision forced on it by the Leader of the House.

5.49 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): This has been a useful debate. I suspect this is not last time that we will have such a debate, if for no other reason than the terms of the Government's motion, which refers to

"the party which received an overall majority".

Those words do not exist in our Standing Orders.

We have always understood that the Conservative party is a wholly owned subsidiary of its current leader, which publishes no accounts and has no written rules. It now transpires that the same applies to the Conservative parliamentary party. I believe I am correct when I say that its only written rules are those to trigger a leadership election. It does not have any standing orders or written code of conduct, unlike the parliamentary Labour party. That raises the question, what does the Conservative Whip mean? What does membership of the Conservative parliamentary party or membership of the 1922 Committee, although it represents Back Benchers only, mean?

Our constituents understand the difference between the Labour and Conservative parties, but how are they to understand that now, according to the Tory party, everything in the House is built on a myth? The Conservative parliamentary party is now in trouble, because it has lost its majority in the House. The fact that some of its members were not prepared to lay down their political lives in a vote of confidence to keep the Prime Minister in power shows that their party no longer commands a majority.

What do our constituents make of it all when it turns out that, at the whim of the Prime Minister—just one member of the Conservative parliamentary party—and probably the Government Chief Whip, it was decided to withdraw the Whip from some colleagues? They made that decision behind closed doors, and did not seek the approval of their party. In that manner, the Whip was withdrawn from eight Conservative Members in one week—perhaps the same will happen to 80 in a following week. All that was done without seeking the approval of the 1922 Committee, let alone the rest of the Conservative parliamentary party.

The same could not happen under a Labour Government, because, under party rules, every Labour Member of Parliament signs a contract—a document. *[Interruption.]* Oh, yes. On selection as a Labour party candidate, one signs an agreement to abide by the written standing orders of the parliamentary Labour party. Those written rules include a written code of conduct in which certain procedures are laid down.

No such written procedures exist for the Conservative parliamentary party. We are entitled to ask where the line is drawn as to how many Conservative Members can have the Whip withdrawn while the Prime Minister of the day still maintains that his party has a mythical majority in the House. We need the answer to that question.

Those hon. Members who have lost the Whip clearly want it back—it would have been so much easier if just that had happened—and they need to know the terms on which they must crawl back into the Conservative party. If they were Labour Members of Parliament, there would be no secrets about those terms. We have a written code of conduct—a public document—which is part of our standing orders and is available to anyone. It lays down the procedures governing expulsion from the party, suspension of the Whip and the procedures to get it back. It also makes clear the conduct that one is expected to maintain when one has either had the Whip withdrawn or has been expelled from the party.

A similar situation to that confronting the House tonight could never arise under a Labour Government. We are therefore entitled to demand a proper explanation from the Conservative party before it cheats again—it is cheating on the rules of the House by creating Conservative Members of Parliament for one purpose and suspending them for another.

The motion is all about trying to keep a weakened Prime Minister in power. The Opposition and the public demand that the Conservatives get their act in order. They should publish their accounts and make written rules about the conduct of those who are and are not members of the Conservative parliamentary party. They should define the twilight area in which Conservative Members who are elected by the people according to their election addresses and their party's programme are then cast aside by a member of their party, the given leader, without any approval from their colleagues. All of a sudden, however, the Government then turn round and say, "No, no, they are really part of us collectively, because we need to keep our majority to force through the House all the legislation that we want."

The Conservative Government want to maintain their numbers on any Standing Committee—Conservative Members currently account for more than half the membership of a Committee—because they claim that more than half of the Members of the House are members of the Conservative party. That is not true. We already know that the Conservatives won less than half the votes of the electorate.

Tonight the Government are cheating on the rules. They are placing the Clerks of the House in an impossible position. They are sending the wrong signals to the Committee of Selection, which, frankly, puts the Chairman and the rest of that Committee in a dishonourable position. I am not claiming that individuals are acting dishonourably, but that the collective arrangements are dishonourable.

The Leader of the House owes it to the House and his party to explain how the Conservative parliamentary party can operate without any written rules, unlike the parliamentary Labour party. At some time, I also hope that I shall get the courtesy of a reply to the letter that I wrote to the chairman of the 1922 Committee.

5.55 pm

Mr. Newton: With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to reply to the debate.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that he felt that I had been uneasy as I presented my arguments. That may have been the impression gained through some deficiency in my presentation, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that I believe strongly in the points that I put, for reasons that I shall come back to in a moment.

We have had a rather good-natured debate in the circumstances and a number of engaging interventions, not least from some of my hon. Friends whose position is at issue. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) made a characteristically perceptive speech about some of the difficulties of presenting the issues in the House. I am not sure that I can go as far as saying that I agreed with every word of his speech, but I had some sympathy with the perceptions that he expressed about those difficulties.

[Mr. Newton]

I am grateful to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) for the effective way in which he demolished some of the arguments of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and others.

I give an undertaking to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) that I shall draw his remarks to the attention of those responsible for the appointment of Members to the bodies he mentioned. The Committee of Selection is not, of course, responsible for those appointments.

I respect the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and the reasons he gave for tabling his amendment. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South about the impracticability of the proposals contained in my hon. Friend's amendment. I understand the reasons behind them, but, in practice, his proposals could not be operated as he envisages. They would represent a mathematical nightmare for the Committee of Selection. The position of the Members in question would be a good deal worse if they were added to the long list of those to be represented in the Committee of Selection by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire than under the proposal I sketched in my speech.

The biggest difference that I have with my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) is their belief that, were my motion to be passed, the power of the Executive would somehow increase. The weight of my argument is that, as a result of the motion, the position and power of the Whips would be enshrined in the procedures and Standing Orders of the House for the first time.

I believe strongly that what should determine the status of Members of the House for the purpose of its procedures is what they were elected as and what they declare themselves to be. I hope that, for reasons going well beyond today's debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North would continue to wish to declare himself a Conservative.

Mr. Marlow: What the Opposition suggest in their amendment may do that, but nothing that my right hon. Friend has said or that I have said would enhance the power of the Whips.

Mr. Newton: We have a difference of view. I regard this as establishing the constitutional position of Members of Parliament in relation to the electorate and their own opinion of what their party affiliation is.

Lastly, if what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) says about the Labour party's constitution is right—frankly, I thought that, with every word that was uttered by him, and by the hon. Members for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), they dug a deeper hole—it is inconsistent with the amendment that they and other Opposition Members have tabled, which says that, if anyone is denied the Whip, that person is effectively expelled from the parliamentary party and cannot be counted as belonging to that party. The letter that the hon. Member for Perry Barr sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) says that, in those circumstances, the Labour party would continue to claim them. There is a hopeless inconsistency there. I have no intention of discussing it further.

I commend my excellent motion to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 327.

Division No. 33] **[6.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug

Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Barbara Roche and Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence

Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr Derek Conway and
Mr Michael Bates.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 288.

Division No. 34] **[6.17 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Derek Conway and
Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim

Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wkshire)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliver, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Barbara Roche and
Mr. Joe Benton.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, unless and until the party which achieved an overall majority of Members elected at the preceding general election loses that majority either as a result of by-elections or through the secession of Members to another party, the Committee of Selection shall interpret paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees) in such a way as to give that party a majority on any standing committee.

Cleveland

Madam Speaker: Before we come to the motion on local government, I should inform the House that I have limited Back-Bench speeches during the debate to 10 minutes. Of course that does not include the two Front Benches, nor does it include the spokesman for the third party.

6.32 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move,

That the draft Cleveland (Structural Change) Order 1994, which was laid before the House on 8th December, be approved.

The Local Government Commission published its final recommendations for Cleveland on 8 November 1993 and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced his decision on 18 January 1994.

We agree with the commission that more effective and convenient local government in Cleveland will best be achieved by establishing four unitary authorities on the boundaries of the existing borough councils of Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Stockton-on-Tees and Langbaurgh-on-Tees—the latter to be named Redcar and Cleveland—and that that will reflect the interests and identities of local people.

It is important to emphasise what the work and recommendations of the Local Government Commission are intended to achieve—which is not to pass judgment on the merits or otherwise of individual councils. The policy guidance to the commission contains the message again and again that its job is to explore whether better structures for local government are available.

Not all hon. Gentlemen have felt themselves bound by the same constraints. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) has been fierce in his defence of Cleveland council. The hon. Members for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) have been fierce in their denunciation of Cleveland council. The task of reconciling their views is not for me, but is one, I assume, for the Labour Whips, among whose number is, was or perhaps is no longer to be the hon. Member for Hartlepool—unless the Labour party has invented a new form of the Silken Whip, which strikes but does not bite. I remain to be enlightened on that particular phenomenon.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Can my hon. Friend clarify the position? The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) spoke out strongly in support of the order in the House on 29 June 1994 and in other places, yet we understand from his local press that he now proposes either to vote against or to abstain on the motion. How can that be?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend draws my attention to the strong representations made by the hon. Members for Hartlepool and for Middlesbrough. It is a subject that raises strong passions which I fully understand. It is for me to look at the commission's recommendations in the light of the functioning and the structures of local government. Of course, hon. Gentlemen will reconcile their views with those of their hon. Friends during the debate and the voting.

Article 3 gives effect to the Local Government Commission's main recommendations for local government structure in Cleveland and provides for reorganisation on 1 April 1996. On that date, Cleveland county council will be wound up and functions and powers will be transferred to the four borough authorities.

The original intention was for reorganisation from 1 April 1995; however, the county council's judicial review application, which was turned down by the High Court in June, made it impossible to stick to that timetable without putting at risk smooth transition and proper provision of essential services.

Although there are no proceedings currently before the courts, Cleveland county council has applied for leave to appeal by means of an oral hearing before the Court of Appeal. The date of that hearing has not yet been set. Before the order was laid, we carefully considered whether that outstanding request for leave to appeal should prevent laying and debating the order, but we concluded that it should not. If Parliament approves the draft order, we shall, of course, take stock of the position on legal proceedings before the order is made.

The Local Government Commission recommended in its final report on Cleveland and Durham that, for ceremonial and related purposes, the county area of Cleveland should be divided between County Durham and Yorkshire. Although we have accepted that proposal in principle, we shall not be taking a final decision until we have reached conclusions on the future structure of local government in County Durham and North Yorkshire. The present order does not address that issue.

Having considered local views, we are providing for all-out elections to all four borough councils, including Hartlepool, which normally elects by thirds, in May 1995. The councillors elected then will have a fresh mandate from the people of Cleveland to plan for change, and then to take over responsibility for running all local authority services from the following April.

To ensure a smooth transition and to safeguard essential services, the five Cleveland authorities will be given extra duties and powers to prepare for the reorganisation. The order draws a distinction between what the successor authorities can do before and after the elections in May. They should be able to prepare for reorganisation from the time the order is made, but we strongly believe that the decisions that will determine the outlook and culture of the successor authorities, along with appointments of chief officers, should be taken after the elections in May by the councillors who are elected with the mandate for the change in functions.

There will be a duty on all five existing councils to co-operate in implementing reorganisation. The borough councils will also have access to information which they need and will be able to make the necessary preparations, including budget setting and appointing staff, in advance of the transfer and exercise of the functions which they will inherit from 1 April 1996. The new authorities will also be required to consider whether particular functions can best be carried out from voluntary joint arrangements.

The order also provides for a number of other matters on which the Local Government Commission made recommendations or which result from reorganisation. It paves the way for a combined fire authority for Cleveland, which will be created by a separate order under the Fire Services Act 1947, to be made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. It also provides for representatives of the new unitary authorities to replace the county council's nominees on the Cleveland police authority from 1 October 1995 for certain purposes so that

[Mr. Curry]

they can be involved in the decision on the 1996-97 budget and policing plans. The county council's representatives will stay on the authority for all other purposes until the county council is abolished in the following April. The order vests the county council's superannuation fund in Middlesbrough borough council, which is also designated for the purposes of certain financial regulations.

As unitary authorities, the four Cleveland boroughs will be responsible for both strategic and local land use planning for their areas. We are determined that, wherever there is reorganisation, there should be adequate arrangements for strategic planning. In the case of Cleveland, the commission proposed that the four unitary authorities should maintain separate local plans but work together on a joint structure plan; we have accepted that recommendation.

The order gives effect to the recommendation by transferring the county's strategic planning responsibilities to the four borough councils, which can then make the necessary voluntary arrangements for joint working on the structure plan. We anticipate that the authorities in Cleveland will establish satisfactory arrangements, and are much encouraged by the proposals that they have published for joint work on strategic planning for the Tees valley.

Finally, the order implements the commission's recommendation that the borough of Langbaurgh-on-Tees be renamed Redcar and Cleveland, and provides for representatives of that council to take the place of the county council on the North York Moors national park committee. The Government, and everyone concerned with local government in Cleveland, must now make the reorganisation a success.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): So far, the Minister has not mentioned those who work for the local authorities involved. Can he assure us that, following negotiations with local trade unions, not one job will be lost as a result of the reorganisation?

Mr. Curry: The whole purpose of electing new councils in all-out elections in May is to give those councils responsibility for negotiating the introduction of unitary councils. That will include conditions of employment. The terms and conditions that are available have been made perfectly clear. The hon. Gentleman left his intervention until a rather late stage, but I should have felt bereft had he not made it.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Those of us with an interest in the creation of unitary authorities in other parts of the country are listening carefully to my hon. Friend's remarks about arrangements for Cleveland, which may well represent a pilot scheme. Is he satisfied that the period of 12 months allowed for a shadow authority to operate is long enough, given the new ground that is being broken? Previously, we were bringing authorities together to form larger authorities; we are now splitting them into smaller ones. A learning curve must be negotiated.

Mr. Curry: Without anticipating the outcome of deliberations about Hereford and Worcester, I can say that I consider that period sufficient. I have undertaken that, wherever possible, we will elect shadow authorities that will be responsible for preparing the new ground, and will have a full year in which to do so. The process must be completed as quickly as can sensibly be arranged. I doubt that many people would welcome its protraction, given the obvious uncertainties: people want to know where they stand on such matters as employment, and I believe that the time scale is about right for the delivery of the responsibilities involved.

Mr. Skinner: So there are no job guarantees?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman intervenes from a sedentary position. I have already replied to his question.

Mr. Skinner: What guarantees will the Government give that not a single worker currently employed in the area will lose his job as a result of the reorganisation on which the Government are insisting?

Mr. Curry: I always find the hon. Gentleman's interventions intriguing. We are discussing the reorganisation of a council that happens to be under Labour control, which will devolve to four unitary authorities whose districts are also under Labour control. If the Labour party cannot sort out its policies without running scared in front of the unions whose heavy hand appears to be on the process, it should not assume that responsibility. I wish to give the Labour councils that responsibility, however, because it is their job: that is why we are giving them a period of "shadow working".

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Will my hon. Friend ignore the frantic efforts of Opposition Members with vested interests in keeping the Cleveland gravy train on the rails? Is he aware that millions of people in Yorkshire have been living for the day that heralded the abolition of a mythical county—and that of Humberside—so that Yorkshire can stretch from the Humber to the Tees as it did for a thousand years? Will he also consider my proposal to restore the Yorkshire ridings, which were a traditional and honourable feature of our county for a thousand years?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. This is a short debate, and interventions should be brief and to the point. Hon. Members should not make speeches.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) was undoubtedly referring to my remarks about the possible ceremonial functions to be bestowed on the unitary authorities. Some, of course, used to belong to the historical Yorkshire, just as some belonged to the historical Durham. We shall have to consult when the time comes to decide which is the best designation.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), the Minister mentioned local authorities' freedom to determine the operation of service conditions and staff structures. To do that, they will need powers. What powers will they have in the event of detriment, when employees suffer a loss of service conditions, and what will happen when direct service organisations are transferred? I do not think that the Minister has granted any such powers yet or has announced his intentions.

Mr. Curry: I am delighted that the Trappist silence that overwhelmed Labour Members at the beginning of the debate appears to have been succeeded by more active participation.

We are currently consulting on a scheme to deal with detriment, and the outcome will depend on the result of that consultation. As for the hon. Gentleman's other question, he will know that when a DSO is transferred, its current responsibility will devolve to the new authorities. We expect successor authorities either to maintain or to review existing arrangements as the law prescribes.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Minister said that it would be up to the Labour party to sort out the employment issues, but surely he has considerable control over the position. As matters stand, he is responsible for determining budgets both for the current Cleveland authority in its final year and for the districts. Will those budgets permit the authorities to make the decisions that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) wants to be made?

I should like to ask another question—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already pointed out that this is a short debate, and that interventions should be brief and to the point. Let me add that long interventions from hon. Members who have not put their names down to make speeches will deprive others—probably including Cleveland Members—of the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Curry: I have been hovering on the brink of my final sentence for about eight interventions. The answer to the intervention of the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) is as follows: the successor authorities will receive credit approvals and repayments will be deferred for four years to enable them to make the financial arrangements that are necessary for them to move from the present structure to the new one.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The Minister has yet to mention the customers—the "consumers" of council services. There are bound to be transitional difficulties. Is he confident that the long-term gains will outweigh the short-term costs? If so, how can he be so confident?

Mr. Curry: Yes, I am confident. We required the commission to present its estimate of the costs; it estimates the transitional costs to be between £13 million and £18 million, and the annual savings to be between £6 million and £11 million. The savings will clearly recur year on year.

Over the past year, there has been considerable uncertainty for all concerned in local government, but I have no doubt that the local authorities in Cleveland have the ability to make a success of the new local government structure. I therefore commend the order to the House.

6.49 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): This draft order from the current Tory Government proposes abolishing the Cleveland county council which was set up by a previous Tory Government. I should like to make it clear that we will oppose the order. It is a product of the local government review, a review conceived in malice towards a limited number of Labour county councils. Since its conception, it has been conducted in confusion and litigation.

The outcome of the review, in so far as we can see it, does not resemble what the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said when he introduced it:

"We know that most local authorities want unitary status and we believe that such status will provide a better structure for the future in most areas."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1992; Vol. 232, c. 37.]

The commission has not recommended unitary status for most areas. Indeed, a rough count suggests that, of the 296 shire county districts at the start of the process, 230 or more will survive as shire county districts—80 per cent.—and will not be changed or become unitary authorities.

Things have not turned out as the right hon. Member for Henley predicted. The review has turned out exactly as the Labour party predicted, however. One of my predecessors pointed out in the debate that it looked as though the commission would roam around the countryside guided by the whim of the Secretary of State, that the recommendations would be subject to the whim of the Secretary of State and that they would leave local government in chaos—and so it has turned out. After two years of wrangling, vast expense and court cases, we do not have a sensible set of propositions from the review. After two years of councillors and officials quite understandably either promoting change or defending the status quo, we do not have a sensible set of measures. Throughout the whole period, those councillors, including Tory councillors, have been distracted from their real tasks of trying to provide decent services for local people.

It would be impossible for any Minister to convince anyone with a grain of sense that the proposals reflect rhyme or reason. The process should have been clear, consistent and straightforward. In other words, rather like those of the Boundary Commission, technically at least the proceedings of the review should have been beyond reproach, but they have not been. They are a shambles. The Government have said that they refuse to await all the recommendations for all the counties before they start pushing through individual orders such as this one, which is the second such order. That is because they want to hide away the inconsistency of the propositions—

Mr. Curry *rose*—

Mr. Dobson: I do not want to give way, since large numbers of hon. Members from the area—

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Curry: I seek clarification. I know that the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said that he wanted no orders to be placed before Parliament until all the orders could be placed before it. Now the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) appears to be agreeing with him. Is that Labour party policy?

Mr. Dobson: We have always made it clear that we believe that all the recommendations should be revealed to the House before it starts considering individual recommendations. The Government are proceeding with individual recommendations before everything is known because they want to distract attention from the contradictions in the propositions. For instance, Rutland, with a population of 33,000, is to become a fully independent unitary authority, while Norwich, Ipswich and Exeter, ancient cities which used to be county boroughs, and with populations of more than 100,000, are not to have unitary status. Blackburn, with 139,000 people, will not get it; nor will Warrington and Northampton, with populations of more than 180,000. We

[Mr. Dobson]

regard the whole outcome as a shambles, which is why we think that the House should be able to see all the proposals before we proceed to vote through any of them.

The Secretary of State will not even guarantee that he will put all the final recommendations of the review commission to the House. In refusing to do so, he is breaking the undertaking given by the right hon. Member for Henley, who said that they would be put before the House. In the absence of the Secretary of State, will the Minister guarantee that the Government will put to the House all the commission's final recommendations?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman clearly does not understand the process. He has just given us a great spiel about how Exeter, Norwich, Ipswich, and so on, will not have this status, but the Government have not yet reached conclusions on the commission's recommendations for their status. The commission has the responsibility to make recommendations; the Government have the responsibility to consult on them and then to put their recommendations before the House. I certainly give no guarantee that the recommendations, in the form in which they emerge from the commission, will necessarily be put before the House. The legislation does not provide for that and the Government would be running away from their responsibilities if they gave such an undertaking.

Mr. Dobson: That is confirmation, then, that these matters will be decided at the whim of the Secretary of State. God knows, I do not like anybody's whims, but the whims of the present Secretary of State are mindless.

Mr. Curry: If the Secretary of State concluded that it would be right to invite the commission to look again at the case of Lancashire, would the hon. Gentleman's predecessor be pleased or displeased by that decision?

Mr. Dobson: The Minister seems to be deaf as well as stupid. He failed to notice that I referred to the "final" recommendations of the commission. If the Secretary of State refers a case back to the commission and the commission comes back with truly final recommendations, will the Minister put them before the House? That is what I am asking him, and he is refusing to reply, because he wants to leave it to the whim of the Secretary of State. He has now confirmed that it will be left to the whim of the Secretary of State.

Next, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has said, we are concerned that there should be proper protection for the staff who are affected by these changes, both those who are transferred and those who, if they are not transferred, should get compensation. They do not ask for anything enormous or unusual. All they want are the terms and conditions that applied to staff when the metropolitan counties were abolished in 1986. The Secretary of State will not even concede those terms. Presumably, he wants the epitaph on his tombstone to read, "Even meaner than Thatcher".

The compensation order which we are to debate later does not provide for the 84 weeks' compensation that applied in 1986; it provides for only 66 weeks. Nor does it provide for mandatory compensation for staff over 50 years of age—the very people who would really appreciate a guarantee of mandatory compensation.

What has changed since 1986? For one thing, it is harder to get a job now than it was then. There has also been a change to do with compensation, however. Since 1986, the Government have introduced ministerial severance pay, providing Ministers with compensation when they return to the Back Benches. Although they will still have their Members' pay and can get jobs in the City, the Government provide them with compensation as well. That is entirely typical of this Government: harsh treatment of people who lose their jobs through no fault of their own, and generous treatment for themselves when they lose their jobs by virtue of incompetence, venality or adultery.

The Government should reconsider and, at the very least, come up with conditions for the staff that are as good as the ones they were prepared to concede in 1986. This matter will be dealt with at greater length when we come to the compensation order.

The process of the review should have been beyond reproach. It should have been dealt with in a quasi-judicial way. Cleveland was not dealt with like that; it has been more like a kangaroo court. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State himself have all denounced Cleveland in immoderate terms, at Tory party conferences, in the House and all over the place.

Even more important, when we talk about proper standards of conduct in public life, I think that all hon. Members would agree that the chairman of the Local Government Commission should behave in a quasi-judicial manner. We cannot expect the Secretary of State to do so. Pseudo-pontifically, he is about as near as he can get to it. Unfortunately, the chairman of the commission was not so acting when, on 19 October 1993, he wrote to the Secretary of State as follows:

> "It will also be important that the Commission and the Government jointly have some early wins in the difficult initial stages of the review. There is likely to be general acceptance of our recommendations for Avon, Cleveland and Humberside. It would be good to have these accepted while you sort out those areas in which, so far, support for unitary structures is limited and there is substantial opposition to the change."

Public servants who are supposed to carry out their duties in a quasi-judicial manner should not be talking about "early wins" in relation to councils.

The consultation process in Cleveland has been inferior to and different from the process that has been followed in other counties and was criticised by the High Court. Estimates of costs produced by the commission have been at variance with estimates produced elsewhere. Estimates of costs were revised during the consultation procedures, but no one went back to consult the people who had already been consulted.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) was promised that representations received would be made available. Until he pressed for that, nothing was done. He was eventually supplied with a summary. The Government suddenly changed their tune and announced that they would not make documents available. They said that if someone had made representations, he or she might want them regarded as confidential. As I understand it, nearly all the representations made have been suppressed and are not available.

The principle should be reversed. Unless a member of the public says, "I wish my representations to be

confidential," we might assume that in a public matter of this sort they should be made available to the public. People expect them to be made public.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Several individuals who made representations to the Secretary of State have written to me to complain. They have told me that they have written to the Secretary of State asking him to release their letters. As yet, none has been forthcoming.

Mr. Dobson: What my hon. Friend says does not surprise me in the least. There is another example. Hon. Members will remember that the Secretary of State spent about £250,000 to produce a publicity leaflet on London shortly before the London elections. That was supposed to be a consultation exercise. When requests were made for the basic, raw data so that independents could scrutinise the responses, we were told that the forms were completed in confidence and, therefore, could not be released. That is typical.

The draft order is unacceptable to us because the procedures involved have been unfair, unreasonable and chaotic. We believe that the propositions before us are inconsistent with other recommendations. We should not proceed with the orders referred to in the Order Paper until we have guarantees that all the associated orders will be seen by the House and put to the House. We shall not support the order until the Government produce decent guarantees for the staff involved, at least on the lines of those that were agreed in 1986. That is why we shall vote against the draft order.

7.4 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I was interested in what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said about taking comfort from what the High Court judgment had to say about the way in which the consultation process had been carried out. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to a speech by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell). He said:

"It must have been very cold comfort indeed, since on all the counts put forward by Cleveland county council, it lost. The council said that the decision of the Local Government Commission and the Government was unreasonable. It lost. It said that the commission had misconstrued the policy guidance on policy arrangements. It lost. It said that there had been a lack of proper consultation. It lost. It said that the Secretary of State should have referred back Cleveland, as he referred Durham back. It lost. It said that it was unfair for Durham to benefit from the 1993 guidance, but not Cleveland. It lost on that, too. The court rightly pointed out that the four-district option was supported by the majority of the local Members of Parliament. It was also supported by an opinion poll and by direct responses."

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough quoted directly from the learned judge, who said:

"'If this amounts to a submission that democracy is not a panacea for all ills, it sounds odd coming from a county council.'"—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 556-57.]

There seem to be discrepancies in what some Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen are saying.

The order was tabled to provide local services in a cost-effective way, with local accountability of identifiable representatives, while drawing on traditional loyalties. The reason for Cleveland being first through the mill of the House is that there is no natural local affinity for the county, which was drawn up in 1974. It was constituted for administrative convenience and not to command local loyalty.

Indeed, not even Cleveland county council supported the retention of the council. It supported a Teesside authority and was backed by 12.5 per cent. of the population who were consulted in a local poll. The House should know that 75 per cent. of those consulted in a MORI poll agreed with the principle of a single-tier authority. Nearly half those who agreed with that principle—48 per cent.—supported the four unitary authorities of Stockton, Middlesbrough, Langbaurgh and Hartlepool.

Hartlepool county council felt so strongly about the matter that about 90 per cent. of residents nominated the borough as the place in which they felt at home and which they would prefer to see delivering their local services. That strength of feeling has come through in every poll and in the many submissions to the Local Government Commission.

Cleveland county council recognised the strength of that feeling in its submission. It called for Hartlepool, the smallest of the four boroughs, to be carved out as a separate unit from its proposed Teesside authority.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has not missed an opportunity to press for the proposals set out in the local government review to be implemented. In June last year, he asked my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House whether he accepted

"that there will be great disappointment among my constituents that the order implementing the Government's proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Cleveland does not feature in next week's business?"—[*Official Report*, 16 June 1994; Vol. 244, c. 759.]

Later in June, he was pressing my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for these matters, saying:

"Will the Minister reaffirm the Government's strong determination to create four unitary district-based councils in the present county of Cleveland? In addition to the Local Government Commission, the overwhelming majority of the public, most local Members of Parliament, the Government themselves and now the High Court, too, support his opinion. Only the House of Commons has so far not been asked to express a view".—[*Official Report*, 29 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 794.]

It is strange indeed, as the editorial in last night's edition of *The Mail* of Hartlepool remarked—the hon. Member for Hartlepool is an Opposition Whip and is drumming up support among his colleagues to defeat the motion—

"And if Labour with the help of Tory rebels succeeds in blocking the change . . . will the town ever forgive him?"

The editor put it so well, and the answer is, probably not. That is why I am given to understand that the hon. Gentleman may resign his post to stay true to his constituents. As my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) and I will tell him, all great political careers involve at least one resignation.

Why is Labour opposing the order? As we see from early-day motion 347, it is, or was, in line with official Labour policy. The motion was tabled by the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) and signed by the hon. Members for Middlesbrough and for Hartlepool, among others. It sees unitary tier local government

"as a building block towards elective regional government."

Why is Labour opposed to the measure? Perhaps it is for the reason that I read in an article in today's edition of *The Northern Echo*, under the headline:

"Unions' plea to Blair to save County".

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

It reads:

"The request comes from Britain's three biggest unions . . . Unison . . . GMB and the Transport and General Workers' Union.

They have written to Mr. Blair calling on him to make sure there is maximum opposition from Labour MPs to the order to wind up Cleveland—by imposing a three line whip."

We do not know whether Labour Members are on a three-line Whip or a two-line Whip—or possibly a four-line Whip—but I look forward to seeing two Labour Members stepping across the Floor later this evening.

Let me remind the House that the hon. Members for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and for Middlesbrough are sponsored by the GMB. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam)—I cannot see her at the moment—is sponsored by Unison. Perhaps that explains why she has taken the view she has.

What of the hon. Member for Middlesbrough? Not only has he chaired the co-ordinating group to establish unitary district councils; he initiated an Adjournment debate, in July last year, in which he excoriated the county council's handling of local government reorganisation. He pointed out, quite rightly, that Bryan Gould, the previous Member for Dagenham, had said that

"there would be a positive response to the Government's proposals on structure, provided, of course, that the process of consultation was seen to be independent. In the case of the abolition of Cleveland county council, not only has the consultation been independent; it has also been upheld by the law of the land."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 556.]

The hon. Member for Hartlepool, who was present at that debate, fully supported him.

So there we have it. Two members of Labour's Front-Bench scheme [HON. MEMBERS: "Scheme?"]—I mean team, but perhaps it is a scheme—apparently take the view that the order is marvellous and should be approved post haste. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman tonight suddenly seems to be backtracking on what the former Member for Dagenham had to say not so long ago.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Surely no assurance was given to the unions that Labour would save the county of Hartlepool. None was given to the county of Cleveland, and none to the people of Hartlepool or Stockton, that they would get local government power into their own hands and their own authorities.

Mr. Devlin: The fact is that a disgraceful amount of local taxpayers' money in my constituency has been wasted on the campaign against the abolition of Cleveland county council. My hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh and I have stood up on many occasions, in the House and elsewhere, to protest about the serious waste of public money that has gone on. It has been squandered. I personally have not seen anything like it since the abolition of the Greater London council.

We have seen press releases, press conferences at every turn, judicial reviews, which have been unceremoniously thrown out of the High Court, the packing of public meetings throughout Cleveland, letter-writing campaigns, which have gone on relentlessly, the employment of public affairs consultants on huge salaries, employing various people to hold lunches around the place, and niggling at every possible opportunity. I understand that those people have stopped at nothing. Last week, Tory rebels were being contacted in a final attempt to block the move. Every possible stone that could be turned in the campaign has been turned.

But I have to say that, while turmoil and shenanigans have reigned in the Labour party on the issue—it is unable to say whether it is for or against the retention of Cleveland county council—my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh and I have been at one. Our local parties agree with us substantially. On cost, accountability and local identity, the proposals of the local government review meet the needs of local people, and they deserve the support of the House tonight.

7.13 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I should point out for the benefit of the House that the person who contacted the Tory dissidents to test their views on the issue was in fact County Councillor Hazel Pearson, leader of the Conservative group on Cleveland county council. So let us set the record straight. Furthermore, I am rather pleased that the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) is quite unable to distort any of my comments on the issue.

My old adversary, Richard Holt, would have revelled in tonight's joust. He started the campaign to crucify Cleveland years ago, and Tory Ministers have continued the vendetta ever since. It is an indication of the Government's obsession with carrying out their vendetta that they are prepared to put the matter before Parliament while it still remains subject to decision in the courts, despite statements from the Minister, including the Leader of the House, that it would be improper to do so.

The Local Government Commission clearly knew the answer that it had to produce for Cleveland before it had even begun its work. Why else did Sir John Banham write to the Secretary of State about its joint interest in achieving an early win in Cleveland, Avon and Humberside? Why else accuse Cleveland county council of producing fairyland figures when it warned of the inevitable cost implications of speeding up such a massive range of services? Now, of course, we know that those warnings were entirely justified.

Sir John Banham now admits that he knows of

"not one single solitary shred of evidence"

to suggest that unitary authorities of the kind that he proposes to impose on the people of Teesside would be able to provide better services. Indeed, he goes further and concedes that the entire exercise is "a gamble". Why, then, did he and his commission colleagues not say that to the people of Teesside before producing the paltry 40,000 leaflets that were meant to measure the views of more than half a million people? His efforts in Cleveland would have been inadequate even for tiny Rutland.

Why did the commission and the Government refuse the people of Teesside the balanced and accurate information about the options, both for the change and for retention of the present system? Why were the people not told, for example, that the commission's proposal is the most expensive option for change, with the highest level of transitional cost? Why were they not told that the alternative proposal of an authority for Teesside, with a second for Hartlepool, would have been far more cost-effective, in terms of both on-going savings and one-off transitional costs?

Indeed, the Audit Commission, when asked to comment, said in its report:

"Having regard to the costs of readjusting operational services and the way in which the Teesside conurbation functions as a single urban entity, there are features of the two authority option which appear attractive. The structure among all those proposed which best fits community realities and likely to perform best in terms of the three Es."

That paragraph was removed from the Audit Commission's report by the Local Government Commission.

Why did the commission originally estimate the additional cost of its options at around £2 million a year, yet subsequently revise that estimate to £10 million a year, and eventually to £18 million a year, after the end of its discredited and shambolic consultation process? It is little wonder that, when the High Court judges to whom the hon. Member for Stockton, South referred examined the so-called "consultation" process in Cleveland, they concluded that, if a second-hand car salesman had acted with the same attitude to the truth, he would have ended up in the Old Bailey.

Why did the commission, in its report on Cleveland to the Secretary of State, fail to reflect the overwhelming strength of feeling against its proposals, expressed by so very many national and local organisations?

In reports for other areas, all such respondents are listed, with a summary of each individual organisation's views. No such information was provided in the Cleveland report. Why the secrecy? Why has the Secretary of State sought to hide from hon. Members similar information about representations that he has received? On several occasions, Ministers have assured the House that such information would be made available for inspection. In reality, Ministers have done everything possible to deny access to that information. Those representations remain hidden today.

The Secretary of State has reluctantly conceded that the majority of those representations are opposed to the proposals. Of the submissions that he has been prepared to release, there is not one independent voice in favour of the proposals. If such representations exist, why is he keeping them secret? Let us be honest: if they existed at all, he would be parading them proudly in Parliament square, with an escort of the Household Cavalry.

The strength of opposition and alarm over what is proposed cannot be overstated. It covers every service and every sector. Every key representative body from the area's business community—not just the trade unions, but the CBI, the chamber of commerce, the small business club—all regard the idea of fragmenting the Teesside conurbation as economic lunacy—*[Interruption.]*—despite the laughter of the hon. Member for Stockton, South.

Only in Teesside is such a fragmentation of a major industrial community proposed—nowhere else in the country. Why in Cleveland? Health authorities in the area are horrified by the implications for the splitting of social services, and for such key initiatives as care in the community and the Children Act 1989. What nonsense that, at a time when various health authorities are being brought together under a single body, it is proposed that key partners in social services should be broken up.

The health authorities' fears are echoed by health professionals, including the area's general practitioners and the Government's own chief inspector of social services. Service users and service providers are equally horrified, with opposition being expressed by bodies such as the Association of Directors of Social Services, the British Association of Social Workers, the Cleveland Disability Forum, the Spastics Society, Age Concern, the National Deaf Children's Society, the Association of Speech Impaired, the National League of the Blind and Disabled, the North Tees community health council and the Carers National Association.

People in education are similarly opposed, with 42 out of 44 secondary head teachers in the area opposing the proposals, and the same view being expressed by every major teaching association. The Government's own Office of Standards in Education attacked the commission's report for failing to give proper attention to educational provision.

The list is almost endless: the Council for National Parks, the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, English Heritage, the Institution of Highways and Transportation, the Library Association, the National Council of Archives, the regional tourist board, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Youth Hostel Association. It is hard to imagine a wider, stronger or more unanimous expression of opposition.

Every future key economic decision affecting Teesside will now be subject to a quango culture. The proposed Tees Valley development company, comprising 10 business men, 10 councillors and one independent chairman, will be the final piece in the jigsaw of quango government in Cleveland.

I warn those who support the order tonight that they will have to answer to the Cleveland electorate in the future. The scene is set for squabbling between quangos, with the people of Teesside standing by helplessly watching their economic future decline. The only justification that any commission or Minister might have for disregarding such overwhelming evidence would be an equally strong expression of public opinion in favour of the proposals. Yet what is the truth in Cleveland?

Only 2 per cent. of Cleveland's residents have been given an opportunity to have their say on proposals which will affect their lives for years to come, and less than 1 per cent. expressed support for the commission's proposals. It has been alleged that Cleveland county council should go because it is unpopular. In truth, there is no evidence that it is unpopular with the people who should really matter—those it serves.

The Local Government Commission showed that, in just 25 years, Cleveland has achieved an identity level among local people higher than many of the so-called traditional counties which have existed for centuries and which Banham and company now intend to leave untouched.

I have a lot more to say, but I realise that I am close to my time. The truth is that, before the introduction of the two-tier system and the creation of Cleveland, the majority of the area was governed by two county boroughs called Teesside and Hartlepool. In reality, putting right the mistakes of 1974—if mistakes they were—should mean a return to Teesside and Hartlepool. That is what the county council suggested and argued for. But Ministers are so blinkered in their views that they simply cannot bring themselves to agree with anything that the county suggests.

[Mr. Frank Cook]

The problem seems to be that our system pays lip service to democracy and accountability in the Chamber and on public platforms, then slaughters those two characteristics privately in the abattoirs of the Division Lobbies.

7.23 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): First, I declare an interest as a vice-president of the Association of District Councils. I welcome the order and the four new authorities to the elite club of unitary authorities.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) mentioned that illustrious character whom some of us were so privileged to know, Richard Holt, and I am delighted to see his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), here tonight nodding vigorously in agreement with the Minister. He is a man who has made much progress in the House, not only having established a unitary authority tonight for his local authority, but having joined that illustrious band in the Whips Office.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister for not having given him notice of what I am about to say, but perhaps I might do so now for any future orders for unitary authorities. They tend to divide themselves into two parts—those that hive up the functions of local government and those that hive them down. The previous order for the Isle of Wight was a hiving-up order and this one is a hiving down into four unitary authorities.

I do not object to the order, but I shall continue to make my point concerning the position of parish and town councils under the reorganisation of local government whenever such orders come before the House.

This is like "Brideshead Revisited" for me because I chaired the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill. I remember that at the last minute Cleveland county council suddenly decided that it would object to the Bill and it sent along a rather extraordinary county councillor who professed to be a sudden convert to the ornithology of the salt marshes around Tees and Hartlepool, most of which had suffered over the years from the industrial output of the ICI fertiliser plant. It would be difficult to believe that there was so much as a stuffed bird there, let alone a winged one.

During that county councillor's cross-examination it became clear that all that he knew about birds was the frozen poultry counter in his local supermarket. One rather gathers, even from the lower echelons of the Isle of Wight, that Cleveland county council is a professional objector without an objective standpoint.

The House of Commons Library tells me that there are 30 parish councils and two town councils in the local government reorganisation. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of the point that I wish to raise, but I want to keep emphasising it. It may seem a small administrative point, but if the parish and town councils do not have some legislative mechanism in the reorganisation of local government into unitary authorities, their election cycle will be out of kilter with the local government cycle and their election expenses will, in some cases, come to more than the precept that they raise.

That is a matter of finance and straightforward administration, but worse than that is that politically, if the elections are not aligned, candidates who are not elected for the unitary authorities will subsequently stand for election to the parish and town councils. The system that the mechanism that we are debating is trying to abolish will effectively be duplicated. The citizens who are affected by the orders will never be able to understand why they pay all their rates to the local district or borough council yet the county council spends it all—pretty profligately, as it happens, in most cases. People do not understand that level of accountability.

The merit in the order is that in future rates will be paid to the local authority that spends them, but two separate election dates, one for the local parish and town councils and one for the unitary council, will effectively reduplicate the very system that we are abolishing.

I hope that before long my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us from the Dispatch Box when he intends to bring forward legislation to allow that situation to be amended in future by Order in Council so that wherever we are in the rolling programme of unitary authorities we can adjust the timetable of parish and town council elections to bring them into line, as we did under the previous local government reorganisation.

7.29 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The creation of Cleveland was always one of the least popular aspects of local government reform in 1974, so perhaps it is no great surprise that the Conservative Government wish to abolish it now. However, it would have been hard to conceive of a more ham-fisted, slapdash and incompetent procedure for doing so. In Cleveland the Government had a wonderful opportunity to introduce a local government reform that could have had the support of the vast majority of the local people and widespread support throughout the Cleveland area.

In the event the Government's lack of consultation, their failure to resolve the issue of what should happen to strategic services, their imposition of the costs of reform on local residents, their inadequate attempts to calm the fears of staff, especially those working for the county council, their attempts to rush through an order while the possibility of a judicial review is still present and their basic failure—condemned by Sir John Banham himself—to consider the fundamental role and purpose of local councils, have all led to a general lack of enthusiasm among the residents of Cleveland.

The Government have wasted a large part of the good will that they earned when they first proposed a local government reform in Cleveland. In particular, they have much work to do in reassuring officers facing redundancy as a result of the reforms that they will be treated no more harshly than others who have previously found themselves in a similar position. The Liberal Democrats will seize every opportunity to press the Government hard on that issue.

Compensation must take account of the fact that the four unitary authorities will be continuing authorities. As I and others said when we debated the Isle of Wight order some months ago, continuing authorities, which will occur in relatively few cases, present especially intransigent problems for staff made redundant, and we should all urge the Government to arrange for compensation levels to take that into account.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I have had to consider one further critical point. Local government reform is always disruptive, and no country can afford to reform its local government structure too frequently. There is therefore a grave danger that reform now may in practice preclude a more popular and effective reform in the next Parliament.

Unfortunately, none of the severe defects in the procedure that I have highlighted can be remedied by our vote. The Government have bungled, but the questions facing Members of Parliament now is whether we should still support reform of local government in Cleveland, and whether there is still a majority in favour of that among local residents despite the bungling.

The Government have failed to arrange the sort of full survey of local opinion that the commission has organised in other areas. Instead we are left to rely on a MORI poll with a significant margin of error, carried out among only 1,200 residents. That poll also contains so many different options to choose from that the preference between the status quo and the proposal before us is not clear in the case of residents who chose entirely other options.

At our conference in Cardiff last year we Liberal Democrats made it clear that the Government should find means of consulting local people which enabled them to express a clear preference for one proposal or another. Instead the Government have had to rely on a single muddled opinion poll from which it is difficult to discover what local people really want. That has left it open to the borough councils and the county council to conduct their own opinion polls, and it comes as no surprise to find that those appear to reach different conclusions, which in turn are often interpreted as supporting the various preferences of the different councils. Such surveys do nothing much except muddy the waters even further.

I have therefore done some further analysis of the commission's MORI opinion poll figures with a view to finding out whether the people whose first preference was for one, two or three unitary councils would rather the House passed the order or not. The evidence is partial, but there is some in the second preferences given by poll respondents. If those are added to the initial first preference figures, it is clear that local people favour the unitary option over the status quo; the ratio is about three to two. That clear majority must lead us to consider seriously what other evidence or arguments there are in favour of the order.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Come up and visit. Ask the people. Go to the shopping centre.

Mr. Rendel: If the hon. Gentleman waits a moment he may hear something about that, too.

The commission's poll also provided some evidence of local residents' feelings about the principle of unitary authorities in general. Perhaps it is not surprising that in an area such as Cleveland, where the original reforms were not popular, there is considerable support for that principle. Indeed, it is interesting to note that even at county level there is considerable support for a unitary solution, although that support tended to be for unitary authorities in Hartlepool and Teesside rather than for breaking up Teesside into three further unitary authorities, as is now suggested.

My party has supported the general principle all along, where it can be shown that that option is welcomed by local residents rather than being imposed by central Government. Unitary authorities based on areas smaller than the present county councils will tend to bring democracy and decision making down closer to the local people, who will have more control over their own lives.

It is worth pointing out in passing that the principle of subsidiarity, which the Government are so keen to promote at European level, and now at county council level, too, should also be introduced at national level in the same way, by creating regional governments in England and separate governments for Scotland and Wales. It is absurd for the Prime Minister to say that he supports subsidiarity in an area as large as Europe, and in an area as small as a county, but that he regards the same principle as dangerous and totally unacceptable over an area of intermediate size, such as the United Kingdom.

Finally, in seeking the right answer for Cleveland, which represents one of the most controversial of all the reform proposals, I have taken the trouble to visit the area to discuss the issues with the representatives of the people. *[Interruption.]* No doubt other hon. Members yet to speak in the debate have done the same.

It became clear to me during my visit that there was an overwhelming weight of opinion in favour of a unitary authority in Hartlepool. Opinion on the right solution for the rest of Cleveland appeared more divided, but on balance seemed more or less in line with the MORI opinion poll that I have already described. I therefore believe that if the Labour party votes against the wishes of the people of Hartlepool, Langbaurgh, Middlesbrough and Stockton, those people will not lightly forgive it.

In summary, the message from the people of Cleveland is that the Government have bungled local government reform in a big way. About the only thing that they have got right is the decision to treat each area on its merits and not to insist on one solution for all parts of the country. We, too, will make our decisions on whatever orders come before the House without regard to any decisions that we have taken previously or may wish to take in the future. We shall be concerned only to do whatever we believe to be best for the area under consideration.

Meanwhile the Government have wasted not only vast sums but their opportunity to introduce what could have been, if they had handled it right, a really popular reform with a huge groundswell of good will behind it. They have alienated many who would have been their supporters and who would have supported the reforms, and they have left unanswered many questions that will need to be answered when the proposals are to be implemented. Nevertheless, there is still a clear majority of people in Cleveland who would like the reforms to go through, and it is on that basis that I shall vote for the order and advise my colleagues to do likewise.

7.37 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Under our procedures in the House it is not possible to vote against part of an order, or against some aspects of it. We must vote against the whole order or not vote against it at all.

At the outset it is important to emphasise again something stressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I agreed with some of what my hon. Friend said but not with all of it. As he pointed out, this evening's vote will not be a vote by the Opposition against the principle of creating four

[Mr. Peter Mandelson]

unitary authorities in Cleveland. As a constituency Member, it is my duty to take a broad view and to represent faithfully what I believe are the true opinions and interests of my constituents. That is what I intend to do tonight.

Nobody can deny that for the past 20 years we have lived very uncomfortably with the concept of a Cleveland-wide authority. It is too large for the delivery of personal services yet too small to take a regional strategic view, and it creates confusion for the public and unnecessary duplication among staff. The case for change is now too strong to ignore. The transfer to unitary authorities based on the districts is long overdue.

For the reasons that I shall describe, I believe that the proposals of the Local Government Commission are sensible and that the decision of the Government to adopt them is correct. I support change, first, because it is what the majority—I believe the vast majority—of local people want. The four-district proposal has been shown in three successive independent surveys to be the most popular choice. The thorough consultation process that the Local Government Commission undertook, of which I had extensive personal knowledge, confirmed what the independent surveys of opinion found. In contrast, support for the Teesside-Hartlepool option favoured by the county council, has consistently hovered between only 5 and 8 per cent., despite the vigorous campaign for it. That is completely understandable.

What people in Cleveland want from local government before anything else, as people do everywhere else in the country, is well-managed, accessible and cost-effective local services which meet local needs and are in the hands of local councillors whom they can get hold of and make accountable for their actions. Unitary authorities in Cleveland would provide precisely that.

At present in Cleveland some services such as housing, leisure and waste collection are in local district hands. Other services such as education and social services are in remote county hands. Roads, the environment and other services are in everyone's hands and, in some cases, it appears, in no one's hands at all. If there was some sensible rationale for this division and confusion, it might be worth maintaining, but the original justification that certain responsibilities could not be left with some authorities because they were too small or lacked competence has not been borne out by experience in Cleveland.

All the district councils have managed the services which were left with them in a thoroughly competent and effective way. Everyone from the Audit Commission down recognises and acknowledges that. That leads me to my next point. There is a need to create local councils which reflect both the identities and interests of the local communities that they serve and to ensure that those councils have the capacity to deliver the services for which they are responsible. If we had the first without the second, we would be in trouble. However, in the case of Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh councils, both conditions are amply satisfied. That strongly supports the changes which are being proposed in the order.

However, obviously we need to ask whether carrying out the changes is worth the candle. Is it all too much bother and expense to undertake the reorganisation? My answer is that if it is worth having local government, we might as well get it right and achieve the best possible arrangements so long as we do not incur long-term costs in the process. We would achieve that by accepting the order tonight.

I have a great deal of faith in the proven track record of the district councils to make the transition smooth. I believe that the county council will also do so once it decides to co-operate, probably with a great deal less tension than exists between the districts and the county council at present. I am also satisfied that the council tax payer will be better off financially as a result of the new arrangements.

The most expensive option is to retain the existing two-tier arrangements. Both the four-district change and the Teesside-Hartlepool alternative advanced by the county council would cost less. The argument has been about which change would produce more savings. It boils down to a pretty marginal difference indeed. The propagandists have had a field day on the subject. They have taken the worst extremes of ranges of figures to suit their particular case. I should say only that, with total expenditure in the review area in excess of £800 million, the difference between the options is only about 0.5 per cent.

It is clear that savings would arise from all the options. In the case of the four districts, as the Minister has already said, the savings will be between £6 million and £11 million. That will recur year on year. The transitional costs will be recovered within three years.

I mentioned propaganda. I do not wish to dwell too long on the ingeniously inventive and expensively propagated red herrings of the county council. In other circumstances, media manipulators and spin doctors everywhere, not to mention manufacturers of fax machines, would be proud of the county council's efforts. One of its arguments needs to be refuted tonight. It has been alleged that new unitary councils would be accompanied by a plethora of joint boards, quangos and the like. That is absolutely wrong. There is no substance to the claim whatever.

Aside from such shared arrangements as archives, superannuation and archaeology, there would be joint authorities, which I stress would consist of elected members, only for police and fire. Who on earth could argue with that? The boroughs would assume joint responsibility for structure planning for the whole area. That leads to the last and important point about the economy and the employment prospects of the area. Some individuals in the business community have argued that the area needs a mega-authority called Teesside to take a strategic view of the area and to draw in investment.

I desperately want to see investment and employment created throughout the area. That is the best way to tackle the poverty and deprivation which scars so many of our neighbourhoods, but the best way of achieving that is by allowing local councils with detailed local knowledge and application to work hand in hand with more powerful regional organisations and in partnership with the private sector throughout our region. The recent experience of the Samsung Electronics investment and the leading role that the Northern Development Company played, guiding the local councils, demonstrates that.

In conclusion, the model that we need to look at is a combination of genuinely local services provided by accountable district councils and regional engines of

economic and industrial growth in the public sector, working in partnership with business to obtain the best results for the local population. That is an agenda to await a different Government, but the creation of the unitary authorities by passing the order is an essential foundation. I believe that it should commend itself to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Stuart Bell.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking) *rose—*

7.48 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): As Charlie Chaplin said, enthusiasm is the thing.

I am always grateful to be mentioned in dispatches by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin). He quoted extensively from my speech of 7 July. I should like to quote what he did not. I said:

"We are anxious about jobs, not redundancies. There is no doubt, however, that concern has been expressed about the current redundancy package envisaged. It is essential for there to be a fair and mandatory system of compensation. This is essential to complete the local government review successfully in Cleveland and, indeed, elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 558.]

So we have placed on record our concern about jobs and redundancy packages. There will be another debate and another vote on that issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who is still in the Chamber, made a fine speech that came from the heart as well as from the facts. I am told that the best speeches come from the heart.

Mr. Mandelson: The fax?

Mr. Bell: I said facts, not fax. We shall come to the faxes later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North made a speech which came from the heart and which was memorable. He mentioned the Tees Valley development company. I assure him that the company will be a genuine partnership between the public and the private sector. There will be a strong political input and influence and no one is more concerned than we are in Cleveland about the growth of quangos. I can assure my hon. Friend that a new quango will not be created through the Tees Valley development company.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) mentioned Samsung and I must put on record—as I did from the Front Bench the day after the event—the fact that we recognise the role played by Cleveland county council in that development. We obliged the Government to recognise that and they did so today from the Dispatch Box. We all recognise that very important fact.

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will my hon. Friend extend the same compliments to some other employees in Cleveland county who worked so hard on education and social services and who have, to some extent, been abused in this debate?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful that I allowed my hon. Friend to intervene. She anticipates the next part of my speech. We should give credit not only to Cleveland county council and its leader but to local councillors, those on the executive side and the people in the fire, education and social services, who have done an excellent job, which is recognised all round.

In my front room, a painting of Crauford's Light Brigade hangs on the wall, in which the 95th, 43rd and 52nd Rifles face about once more to hold back the enemy. It depicts soldiers standing in the snow, preparing a rearguard action. Their job was to hold back the enemy during the retreat from Spain of Sir John Moore's army after the battle of Corunna, where Sir John was killed.

No one can deny that the rearguard action fought by Cleveland county council was of heroic proportions. It fought, not in the snows of Cleveland, but in the press, on the radio and through the fax machine. If any of us ever gets our hands on the inventor of that machine, we will strangle him and we will say not, "Remember the Alamo," but, "Remember Cleveland county council." We hope that the days when we came to our offices to find five to 10 pages on the fax machine are over.

Cleveland fought the battle not only through the fax machine but through the courts. The hon. Member for Stockton, South referred to that fact. Under adverse conditions, its delaying tactics were brilliant, but just as in the rearguard actions of old the last soldier falls, doomed, its action falls doomed tonight. Its rearguard action is over. The snows of yesteryear do not concern us. I hope that the battle is over.

Those who are anxious to know how some Labour Members will vote would probably like to be reminded of Aneurin Bevan's famous comment that he who fights and runs away lives to run away another day and he who speaks but does not vote lives to vote another day. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said that a compensation order would be introduced to deal with employment conditions in the Cleveland area, and our votes will surely be behind our Front Bench on that occasion.

More than two Labour Members of Parliament will not vote on this issue. Others have strongly supported the concept of the single-tier authority and have supported the district authority. For the past 20 years, the Labour party has been committed to moving towards single-tier authorities in many of our major cities and I am satisfied that tonight many of the Members who fought so long will take note of the vote and the long struggle.

It is just after the Christmas holidays and good will prevails. To Paul Hartford, leader of the council, I would say, "You ran a strong campaign." I surmise that no one in the House or in the country has been unaware of it. It was strong and he deserves credit for running it in the interests of what he believed to be right.

We are in a poetic frame of mind and a man's grasp must exceed his reach

"Or what's a heaven for?"

Mr. Frank Cook: His

"reach should exceed his grasp".

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend is rewriting Browning, as he often rewrites history, but we will forgive him that at this time.

Tonight we offer a new opportunity—

Mr. Cook: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Checking the *Official Report* will prove who was correct.

[Mr. Cook]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking some of his hon. Friend's 10 minutes.

Mr. Bell: We offer a new beginning for the people of Cleveland and it is power to the people. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North gave us a litany of the organisations in Cleveland that supported Cleveland county council. The only category that he left out was the people. He did not take them into account. The people of Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Langbaurgh and Stockton have shown in opinion polls, consultations and proceedings of every kind that one could wish for, that they want a single tier—the four-district option. That part of history cannot be rewritten. We are offering the people of Cleveland a new beginning—local democracy closer to the people, accountability to the people and a duty to serve, rather than to rule.

We do not want to confuse this great occasion by mentioning Abraham Lincoln—I may be corrected again by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North—but he believed in government of the people, for the people and by the people. Let the decision of the House tonight be that the people of Cleveland should be the winners and not the bureaucrats, the elected councillors acting in caucus or single-issue pressure groups. Let us remember that we are here to serve, rather than to rule. That will be the concept for authorities in the future. This will be the new beginning and that is what I accept and will fully support tonight—[HON. MEMBERS: "Will you vote for it, then?"]—after the vote is called.

7.56 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): My reason for taking a few minutes during this debate is that I spent a short time as a member of the Local Government Commission. I thank the Minister for giving me the opportunity to do so.

I share the view of many hon. Members—the principle of unitary authorities is one that I support and that is why I accepted that position. People are best served through unitary government, with one authority responsible for all personal services.

Frankly, however, this exercise in local authority reorganisation has been a disaster for a number of reasons. The legislation was poorly drafted. It did not enable the Local Government Commission or the House to consider organic change, either by giving some authorities, especially the large cities, the opportunity to become unitary authorities, or by allowing some personal services to be devolved to the districts, with strategic planning kept at the county level. There was no provision for a regional tier of government, which is essential if we want to retain a whole range of strategic issues under democratic control.

The Lancashire county council judgment, which resulted from the poorly phrased legislation, was a disaster. Inevitably, it led to most of the main players in the debate moving towards the status quo. Those who sought change were unable to achieve a consensus. The process was not a happy one.

Local government has been poorly served by the chairman of the Local Government Commission. He showed no consistency of approach, was too often influenced by personal preferences and personal experiences, rather than objective assessment, and operated somewhat undemocratically and autocratically. We should have dispensed with his services.

Members of the commission—I include myself—were an ad hoc group of people who had little in common and were not well served by officers who were hastily brought together without ensuring that they had the proper competencies.

The results for Cleveland are quite sensible, but Cleveland is the exception, not the rule. The overall results for local government are a disaster. If we start approving in an ad hoc way reorganisation for one or two parts of the country, we shall end up with an administrative and a structural mess, with no coherence, consistency or common sense. We shall have to return to the issue when Labour takes office rather than get on with developing the services that local communities require.

The Government should and could have taken another view. The legislation is wrong, the process has been bungled and the outcome is a mess. This review has been a failure and it is a disaster for local government. Parliament has got local government into a mess and it will be up to a future Labour Government to clear it up.

8 pm

Mr. Curry: With the leave of the House, I wish to make a few rapid comments in reply. I understand why Opposition Front-Bench Members did not wish to reply in the light of the remarks of Labour Members tonight.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made an important statement. He said that no recommendation should be placed before the House until the process had been completed. I hope that he knows the implications of his statement in terms of uncertainty for all those who work in local government. I hope that he has discussed the matter with some of the Labour leaders of local authorities such as Hull, which is about as rock solid a Labour authority as it is possible to get. The implication of what he said perpetuates uncertainty and discontent throughout local government. It is just as well that people realise that it will mean a period of protracted uncertainty. It is hypocritical to pretend that one is concerned about people's employment prospects if the process is to be kept hanging over them until it is finished and the recommendations are bunched up and brought before the House.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman anticipated the review and talked about the areas that should get unitary status. With the aid of clairvoyance, he mentioned Ipswich, Norwich and Exeter. He certainly does not understand the past; perhaps he is better on the future. Is that Labour policy? If so, perhaps he forgets that the old county boroughs would become unitary, that Hartlepool and Middlesbrough are old county boroughs and that Stockton was close to an old county borough because it had special powers over education and other areas. So the hon. Gentleman has contradicted himself. That simply does not work—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [16 December].*

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Devlin (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you could keep the Doors to the Lobby open for a little longer as the hon.

Members for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) seemed to lose their way into the Aye Lobby.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was not a point of order and the hon. Gentleman knows it. It was an abuse of the House.

The House having divided: Ayes 310, Noes 223.

Division No. 35] **[8.02 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm

Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Bates and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Estelle Morris and
Mr. Stephen Byers.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Cleveland (Structural Change) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 8th December, be approved.

Value Added Tax

8.15 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move,

That the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3013), dated 29th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following motion:

That the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3014), dated 29th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.

We have two orders to consider, the first being the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1994. I will briefly set out the reasoning behind the order and the need for it.

The order closes a widely used VAT avoidance scheme, which is most often implemented by the use of commercial lease and leaseback arrangements, although it is not limited solely to those schemes.

Hon. Members will know that businesses supplying goods and services that are exempt from VAT, such as finance, gaming, health and educational services are not able to recover all the VAT that they pay on their own expenditure. Sometimes they cannot recover any of it. In contrast, businesses supplying goods and services that bear VAT can recover the VAT they pay on their expenditure. When an exempt business purchases a new building or has one constructed it will pay a large amount of VAT which would normally be wholly or mainly irrecoverable. In order to avoid that, some businesses have been leasing the building to an associated company, often formed specifically for the purpose, and then leasing it back again and occupying it.

Both companies then make use of a provision called the option to tax, which allows them to tax the rents charged under the leases, which would ordinarily be exempt from VAT. That allows the exempt company to recover from the outset the VAT paid on the building. It cannot recover VAT on rents paid to the associated company under that lease, but as the lease is often extremely long, that has the effect of artificially spreading VAT paid on the building over many years. In one extreme case, a lease of 2,000 years was used. The Exchequer cannot wait that long to collect VAT on buildings constructed today.

The avoidance device is increasingly used in the financial sector but also by some universities, some fee-paying schools, hospitals and charities. In some grant-funded building projects the VAT will already have been catered for in the grant, so it cannot be right that such projects also enjoy an additional VAT relief through an avoidance scheme.

Those schemes are costing the Exchequer £200 million a year. We therefore decided that the option to tax should not be made available to those using such a scheme. VAT paid on buildings will properly accrue to the Exchequer from the outset. The necessary order effecting that was laid before the House on 29 November and took effect on 30 November.

The provision is not retrospective. Existing leases will not be affected. Under article 2 of the order, an option to tax will be ineffective on leases executed or land transferred on or after 30 November 1994 if at the time, first, the grantor and the grantee are connected and, secondly, either the grantor or grantee is not entitled to recover all the VAT paid on its business expenditure. Thus the rental income will be exempt from VAT, and tax on the building cost will not be recoverable.

The measure, therefore, is not intended to affect businesses engaged in normal commercial property transactions, nor does it prevent the use of lease and leaseback arrangements. It merely ensures that the Exchequer receives revenue at the correct time in accordance with the original intention behind the VAT legislation. I commend the order to the House.

The second order before us is the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994. That order was also made on 29 November 1994, but comes into effect on 1 April 1995. Public passenger transport in this country, unlike most other European countries, is zero-rated. It has been so since VAT was introduced in 1973, and was justified on social grounds.

The order aims to bring the scope of the relief more into line with what Parliament originally intended. It is highly selective, removing zero-rating only in circumstances where relief cannot be justified on social grounds, and is clearly distinguishable from the normal concept of public passenger transport.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Can the Minister explain to the House why flights that are intended to cure people's phobia of flying will be subject to VAT, yet booze cruises out to sea and back will not? How can he justify a decision such as that? Where is the logic? Are not the aviation and coach industries being singled out for punitive treatment in that respect?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that a flight leaving one place and returning to the same place, and of the type described, to cure a fear of flying, is not public transport—certainly not in the way that was understood by the House in 1973. Public transport must involve at least a transport of the public from one place to another. That is why we are restricting the zero-rating to what Parliament intended at the time.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall) *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman hopes to speak later on behalf of the Liberal Democrat party—

Mr. Tyler *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman does not, so I give way to him.

Mr. Tyler: It is precisely because I do not want to take the time of the House later that I want to make a specific argument about the tourist industry. I understand clearly what the Minister has just said about the logic, but I think that he is well aware that the tourist industry is alarmed about the proposal, because it will affect a number of steam railways, it will affect operators of boat trips and it appears to be being introduced without any consultation with the tourist industry.

I should be grateful if the Minister would tell us what consultation has taken place with the statutory tourist organisations or tourist operators before or since the order

[Mr. Tyler]

was laid. The statutory organisations have expressed anxiety to me. The proposal appears to have come literally out of the blue, without any proper consultation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It certainly has not come out of the blue because it was announced on 29 November, and therefore there has been time to discuss the matter and to put at rest several unnecessary fears. The hon. Gentleman may be alluding to a number of supposed proposals to apply VAT at a positive rate to boat trips and other tourist attractions, when that is not the intention.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Before I give way again, I shall proceed with my introductory remarks, because I want to emphasise that public transport in its usual and accepted sense, whether it is by bus or by coach, by train, ship or air, is not affected by the order, and will continue to be zero-rated.

I also want to lay at rest any idea or suspicion that the order has anything to do with any requirement from the European Community, because our zero rates are fully safeguarded by the sixth VAT directive, which can be amended only with the unanimous agreement of all member states, and we have no intention of removing zero-rating from public transport.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I declare an interest as a member of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway and the Watercress line. Will my hon. Friend give me a clear assurance that there will be no VAT on train journeys on those preserved railways?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes; I can give that assurance to my hon. Friend. These railways are zero-rated at the moment and will not be affected by the order, so I am happy to give that assurance. I think that that partly answers the argument made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), because many groundless anxieties have been caused, and I hope to set them at rest during the debate.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): When the matter was introduced in the Budget, it was clearly stated, under item 10, that the compliance cost assessment would be referred to relevant trade associations. As someone who is interested in and connected with the major trade association in this country, the Association of British Travel Agents Ltd, I know that the association was not contacted regarding the effect of the proposal. I feel strongly that it is premature to introduce it at this stage, without proper consultation throughout the industry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I give my hon. Friend the assurance that there will be no significant compliance cost because the legislation is a simplifying measure; therefore the anxieties expressed that it will be a bureaucratic imposition on the tourist trade are unfounded, as has been displayed by the compliance cost paper that is available.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There will be opportunities for my hon. Friends to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I do not want to trespass too far into the debate itself. Before I give way again, I shall outline the three main areas of transport covered by the order.

The first main area concerns charges for admission to, or for the use of facilities at, places of amusement, entertainment, historical or cultural interest; those will become wholly liable to the standard rate. Currently, some such places that provide their customers with some forms of transport have been able to treat their supplies as wholly or partly zero-rated, while the rest of the admission charge is liable to VAT at the standard rate.

The second main area concerns charges for car parking facilities provided at airports together with a transport service between the car park and the airport terminal; those will become wholly standard-rated. Such charges may currently be apportioned between standard-rated car parking and zero-rated transport, with some operators being able to apply the zero rate to a high proportion of the total charge, even though the customer is primarily receiving a car parking facility.

The third main area covers pleasure flights, which include hot air balloon rides and other trips by air for pleasure or amusement or for the experience of flying; they will be standard-rated. In some cases that means no change, as rides with fewer than 12 seats are already standard-rated.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I ask my hon. Friend to pursue the matter a little further and elaborate. Are we talking about roller-coaster rides in amusement fairs? Are we talking about ski lifts at Aviemore? Are we talking about overhead cable railways, such as those that run in an amusement park in Yorkshire?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The roller-coaster rides that are seen at funfairs and at some theme parks and so on are already standard-rated, so will not be affected, but train rides within such amusements, or cable rides or monorails, will become standard-rated because such rides are not public transport. A number of known safari or theme parks will not only apply standard rating to existing attractions, but will extend it to the transport elements included in the admission price.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): May I press my hon. Friend a little more on preserved railways? He will know of the great importance that they have in many areas including my own, where we have the Keighley and Worth Valley railway. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that journeys on preserved railways, whether by steam or diesel, will not be subject to VAT, notwithstanding the fact that one of the stations on the Keighley and Worth Valley railway serves Haworth, the home of the Brontes, and is visited by many tourists every year?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I appreciate the fact that my hon. Friend may not be giving full descriptions of all the facilities in his constituency, but his description of the railway leads me to assert with confidence that it will not be standard-rated.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will sporting activities such as club members flying gliders throughout Europe that are currently, because of the sporting aspect, zero-rated in the United Kingdom, continue to be so?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As I understand it, gliding clubs—I know of my hon. Friend's interest in them—are exempted from VAT and will remain unaffected by the order. I am happy to give that assurance.

I emphasise that the order is confined to transport in a narrow range of circumstances, so zero-rating will continue to apply to the vast majority of cases. Steam train rides and boat trips, including ferries and canal boats, which are currently zero-rated, will continue to be relieved. The exception, mentioned earlier, involves trips at places such as theme and safari parks and other places of entertainment or interest. In those circumstances, admission charges, fares or other charges, which are currently either zero-rated or apportioned, will become wholly liable at the standard rate. Subject to the agreement of the House the order will come into effect on 1 April 1995 and is expected to generate additional revenue of about £45 million in a full year.

8.32 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): In dealing with the two orders on VAT I shall first discuss the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1994 and make it clear that we will not press the order to a vote. However, I seek from the Minister some replies and clarification on a number of points. As the Minister has explained, the order involves the VAT exempt sector, which is different from the zero-rated sector. It deals specifically with the subject of lease and leaseback. A number of points have been raised on that issue and on the drafting of the order.

The Law Society has sought clarification from Customs and Excise on the specific nature of the loopholes that are being closed to prevent VAT avoidance. The transactions allowing such avoidance will not be permitted. But the Law Society has told us that Customs and Excise has acknowledged that the order goes too far and goes beyond the steps necessary to prevent VAT avoidance. It has apparently said that some form of extra-statutory concessions may be needed to tidy up the order. I should be grateful if the Minister could this evening tell the House whether that it is so.

The next two issues involve the definition of a third party and the possibility of the order applying retrospectively. It has been made clear that the effective date is 30 November 1994. If that is correct, the order is, arguably, retrospective and could have serious implications for many exempted bodies. Can the Minister give an assurance to the House that the legislation will not be retrospective and that the loophole being closed will take effect as indicated in the order?

My next point relates to the way in which the order blocks the loophole allowing tax avoidance, which it claims to seek to do. The order will be effective in blocking all lease and leaseback schemes. It applies only to the granting of leases between connected parties where either party is exempt. It appears that the exempt person developing the new building for his or her own use could circumvent the order by entering into a third-party agreement on lease or leaseback. The explanations to the provisions are not exactly clear. I should be grateful if we could have confirmation that such circumvention is not possible and that there can be no way in which, by using a third party, exemptions can still be obtained and avoidance achieved.

The Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994 contains an entirely different set of propositions. As some of the interventions this evening have already shown, the order is controversial. It has been extremely tortuous and difficult to identify and pin down the exact sectors to which it will be applied.

The order was hidden among the huge amount of papers that came with the Budget statement on 29 November 1994. During a debate on the Budget resolutions on 5 December 1994, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) raised the issue of the order's impact on the tourist industry as there was already some concern about that. During that debate he explained, in column 38, the problems being experienced by the British Tourist Authority, the cuts in its funding and the implications for tourism of the order. In reply to that debate the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said that the order stopped

"favourable tax treatment for trips in hot air balloons, round trips in Concorde over the bay of Biscay, and so on."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 108.]

The order was presented to the House then as a means of preventing further abuses and dealing with a category that had sneaked in, so there was nothing more to concern the House.

However, the matter was raised again in the Ways and Means debate on 13 December 1994—the mini-Budget or Budget part II as it has become known. The Government still did not seem to know exactly what the order would do. When challenged, the Chancellor said:

"The Government have no intention and would never extend VAT to zero-rated goods"—

which the order covers—

"without primary legislation."

The order is not primary legislation. When my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) challenged him during the debate that the order should be withdrawn and placed before the House as primary legislation, the Chancellor replied:

"The extension of the VAT transport order was done partly under these resolutions and partly under the Finance Bill as well."

The Finance Bill was published on 4 January 1995 and these matters are not covered in that primary legislation. The House has been misled throughout the debates. We were told that VAT would be extended to zero-rated goods only through primary legislation, but there is no primary legislation before the House. The Chancellor went on to say:

"The VAT zero rating on transport is designed to protect passenger transport. It has now been extended to air balloon rides, funfair rides, to things inside theme parks. This legislation covers anomalies of that kind "—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 802-805.]

I think that the Chancellor misled the House again because the order covers far more than that. The Chancellor promised that zero-rating would not be removed without primary legislation. That promise has been broken. It is not in the Finance Bill; it is in the orders which are before us today. The Chancellor and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury either did not know the exact extent of the order, or did not give the House all the available information when they were asked to clarify the situation. The effects of the orders are gradually becoming clearer.

Let us turn to the tourist industry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I wish to clear up one matter. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was quite clearly referring to major changes to VAT legislation. If the hon. Lady is complaining about marginal changes being made by way of orders, can she explain why the last Labour

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

Government did it three times? I have before me an order which removed certain food items from zero-rating because they fell into the category of biscuits. The last Labour Government did that by way of secondary legislation. Why is the hon. Lady complaining when Labour Governments have done the same thing?

Ms Primarolo: I am happy to debate what the last Labour Government did or did not do. If the Minister cares to put it before the House, we will engage in that debate. We are discussing undertakings that were given to the House a matter of weeks ago in parliamentary time about an issue that will have a considerable effect on the tourist industry. The Government are seeking to avoid the consequences of the decisions that they are making. Such is their desperation in moving constantly to indirect taxes to scrape in the money that they are not looking carefully at the implications of their actions for industries in this country.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. Does she accept that not only has the House been misled, but the tourist industry has not had a proper opportunity to take account of the Government's proposals and their implications, both in terms of the statutory bodies—the English tourist board and the regional bodies—and the operators? The Chancellor has misled not only the House but interested parties outside this place.

Ms Primarolo: I agree absolutely. I wish to turn to that point in my remaining remarks on the order.

The House has been misled. It is misleading to label the tax as one which affects only entertainment and recreation, as clearly business travel will also be affected to a large extent—particularly by the increased cost of transport in and around airports. Business tourism is currently experiencing very high levels of growth throughout Europe, and we need to be competitive in that sector.

That point is backed up in correspondence from Sir John Egan, chairman of the CBI's tourism working party and chairman of the BAA, to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry). Sir John made clear the damage that he believes that the decision will do to the tourist industry.

Since 1979, our trade surplus in tourism has turned into a £3.1 billion deficit. Meanwhile, our share of the growing world market has declined. If we had maintained the share of the market that we enjoyed in 1979—under a Labour Government—a further 150,000 jobs would have been created in tourism. Successive Tory Governments have become complacent about tourism. They have cut the budgets to the tourist boards in successive years, with this year being no exception, and they are now trying to apply an added tax burden to tourists in order to raise another £45 million. That is not a significant sum for the Treasury.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has dismissed our claims as scaremongering, saying that the decision will not affect other areas. This evening the Minister tried to skate over its implications for heritage and for museums. Since more than 60 per cent. of overseas tourists claim that they visit Britain for cultural reasons, it is ridiculous for the Government to apply a tax to the very items which attract tourists to this country.

The tourist industry has long been seen as a soft target, and Sir John and Richard Tobias, the chief executive of the British Incoming Tour Operators Association, make that point in their letters. It is interesting to read what the tourist industry representatives are saying. Richard Tobias said:

"Clearly this is yet another example of one of Britain's most successful export industries being taxed to the point where we are becoming uncompetitive against our European neighbours".

Adele Biss from the British Tourist Authority said:

"We are also stressing that the effect on our international competitiveness appears not to have been taken into account by this decision".

Sir John also said:

"each new tax burden therefore is not a burden in isolation,"—

I am sure that every taxpayer in this country knows that—

"but rather becomes an additional part of a cumulative burden that gnaws at the industry's competitiveness".

That is what British tourism is saying about this order's impact on the industry.

It was asked whether consultation had taken place on the issue, and the Minister replied that that had taken place. That is very interesting, because in a written answer on 12 December the Secretary of State for National Heritage said:

"The application of VAT is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who announced on 29 November that services relating to entertainment or recreational activities and car parking at airports, which include passenger transport, will become wholly standard-rated. The measure, which will affect a limited range of businesses, will not involve significant compliance costs . . . "—

I will return to that point later—

"and it is not expected to affect international competitiveness."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. *498*.]

Clearly, at that time he had not spoken to the tourist industry. Of course, consultation was not considered necessary. We must compare his comments to those emanating from the tourist industry. Customs and Excise says that no compliance costs are necessary and that none is expected.

Those in the tourist industry have produced their brochures for the year and committed themselves to costs they cannot now avoid. They must either recall all their brochures, which would involve costs, or sustain the loss that the tax difference will make and endeavour to recoup it next year. No consultation was carried out with the National Heritage Department or with the industry before the order was introduced. The Government continue to claim their commitment to tourism, yet here they are undermining that very process.

I am sure that hon. Members will give many examples this evening, but I want to mention a couple of tourist attractions that will be damaged. I have received correspondence from the director of the slate caverns in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Those who work there are angry and upset. They won an appeal in a VAT tribunal to keep zero-rating on their facilities in the slate caverns, but that tribunal is now overridden by the imposition of the order.

Mr. Jones, the director of the slate caverns, writes:

"The Chancellor's actions could have come from the darkest depths of Stalinist Russia".

It is decorative wording from very angry people. He states that the caverns

"have attracted 5 million tourists in the past 21 years, winning all Britain's top tourism awards and many international accolades."

He continues by explaining how he heard about the order:

"We know of it only because a gleeful VAT officer telephoned before Christmas, saying Budget legislation was on its way to cancel a 1984 court ruling"

and that the two rides provided in the caverns no longer constituted public transport.

Those working at the caverns expected to find the proposals in the Finance Bill because they had been told that the measures would be contained in primary legislation, but, after two days of looking at the Finance Bill, they discovered that that was not so and that the proposals were in a statutory instrument. They were then told by Customs and Excise that the document could not be faxed to them—time was running out and it had been pointed out that we would be debating it today—because that would be breaking Crown copyright. They had to order it from Norwich. They placed their order and they are still waiting for copies of the order that we are discussing tonight. Mr. Jones continued:

"the vindictive intention is clear enough, i.e. to overturn the 1984 court ruling which we won on appeal. It is an act of revenge against a small company which makes a major contribution to the rural economy of North Wales".

The tax will add 87p to the entrance price of £4.95. They have already printed the price list so they are already committed for 1995 and they will have to sustain that loss. There was no consultation and they will have to face plenty of costs—all for £45 million to the Exchequer.

The historic national tramway museum is in a similar position. Somebody once said as a joke that this Government would tax air if they could find a way of doing it. They are certainly trying to tax at every opportunity our heritage and the time that people give freely to such institutions to maintain that part of our heritage. That time is now to be taxed. It is absolutely obscene.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Has my hon. Friend received correspondence about the Birmingham tramway museum? Is she aware that it will be a devastating blow to people in the west midlands, not just in Birmingham but in the surrounding areas, including my constituency, if the museum is to be penalised along the lines that she has described? It is a serious matter. I have received correspondence about it and have recently written to the Minister.

Ms Primarolo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. A number of representations have been made. I was trying to spare the House the agony of going through every single one, because we would exceed the one and a half hours allowed for the debate. I have picked out two examples, but the clear intention of the order is to rake in money not on the basis of Concorde flights over the Bay of Biscay or hot air balloon rides, although it is questionable whether VAT needs to be placed on that.

I am interested to find out why VAT will not apply to glider flights, given that for the gliders to get up in the first place they have to be towed by an aircraft, to which VAT will be applied.

Mr. Bill Walker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Lady. The answer is that gliding clubs are non-profit-making organisations, which throughout Europe are exempt from VAT.

Ms Primarolo: With respect, that makes no difference under the order but I am sure that the Minister will clarify that point. I hope that he will ensure that he uses precise wording and has a clear understanding of the points that his hon. Friends are raising with him before he gives a categorical assurance on the Floor of the House this evening because we take with several pillars of salt the word of any Government Minister about VAT.

Last summer the Chancellor wrote to one of his constituents about VAT on fuel. He made clear the Government's views on extending VAT on to zero-rated goods. It is advisable for all of us as Members of Parliament to answer only the questions that we are asked, as opposed to venturing speculation. The Chancellor wrote:

"I have always thought that we attempt to exempt too many goods and services from VAT in this country. VAT is still imposed on a little over half of all sales, which is much more restrictive than the sale taxes in other countries.".

It is clear that the Chancellor wants to extend VAT and that it will continue to be an issue between now and the next general election, whenever that may be—I hope, sooner rather than later.

The Government continue to give undertakings on the Floor of the House and then break them. They attempt to mislead the House on the purposes of tax orders that are before us. They are driven desperately by the desire to increase indirect taxes, mainly through VAT, to advance a spurious and dishonest argument that they are the Government of reducing taxes. This is a tax too far. They are undermining the industries that they claim to support and I urge all hon. Members to vote against the order this evening.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Although no 10-minute restriction is now in operation, I appeal for short speeches.

8.57 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) sometimes overstates her case, even when she is making a point with which Conservative Members may agree. After all, anyone experiencing difficulty in obtaining a copy of the order could have contacted his or her Member of Parliament, who could easily have supplied it.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned about the national tramway museum in Crich, which is in my constituency. I want to concentrate on the issue of consultation on the museum. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) agrees with many of my views. I feel that my hon. Friend the Minister was less generous with the House than he should have been when he spoke of consultation on the order. It was made on 29 November, and laid before the House on the same day; where was the time for consultation?

I believe that a number of anomalies will remain, given my hon. Friend's logic in the correspondence that we have had on this technical and complicated matter. Those anomalies have been sneaking into parliamentary answers, including written answers given by my hon. Friend the Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) on 13 December. I do not understand why the Treasury's list of items that will remain zero-rated includes ferries, canal boat rides and other boat trips on public waterways, fishing trips and trips around harbours. If a boat went outside a harbour, would VAT be levied?

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

Mystery coach tours are also included. If people start a coach trip without knowing where they are going, that trip will be zero-rated; but a trip to the tramway museum in my constituency, providing a view of the Derbyshire hills, will be liable for VAT. I feel that such measures should be in the Finance Bill: the beauty of that would be the opportunity given to organisations to express concern. As it is, the measures are in an unamendable order.

I hope that, in his closing remarks—if he has time to make them—my hon. Friend the Minister will say that the Finance Bill may give us a chance to discuss any complications that arise from the order. I do not have time to deal with all the problems, because this is a short debate and other hon. Members wish to speak.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McLoughlin: Yes, I will.

Dame Peggy Fenner: I thank my hon. Friend for giving me a few moments in which to emphasise the value of the national tramway museum. Only it and the railway museum are allowed to call themselves "national".

Although my constituency does not contain such a museum, my constituents give up their time voluntarily to work there, raising money to build a beautiful new exhibition hall. They are very worried. Mr. Webster, for instance, came to my advice centre and said that he had known of the proposals for only a couple of weeks, and believes that his projects are in peril. His father was a tram driver, and his whole family go up to work on trams and raise money. Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that no anomalies affect such a wonderful volunteer organisation.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has illustrated the amount of concern that exists. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will take it on board.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case, but I think that the Minister should be asked to withdraw the order and table a Government amendment to the Finance Bill in Committee, providing an opportunity for the discussion and consultation that hon. Members on both sides of the House want.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not think that that is likely to happen. I should be more than happy to receive an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that, if he considers the matter in more detail over the next few months and feels that a change in the Finance Bill is necessary, he will take such action.

The national tramway museum is a small, non-profit-making organisation. It has already printed its literature for next year. I do not want those who run it to have to put up a sign at the entrance saying, "These used to be the entrance prices until the Budget." We do not want an extra 17.5 per cent. added to the museum's charges—that would be rather unfortunate. If it happens to this museum, it will also happen to a number of others. That would not be of much benefit to the Government.

I had the privilege of serving as a Minister for some time. It is most unusual to have to take through the House a piece of legislation that directly impinges on one's own constituency—but that was what happened to me when I took the Transport and Works Bill through the House. The main aim of the Bill was to stop a considerable amount of private legislation being taken on the Floor of the House. I know that many hon. Members were grateful for that.

The Bill, however, also imposed on the national tramway museum the same legal requirements as those governing conventional tramways and railways. The orders meant that such museums were obliged to observe all the onerous legal requirements, including safety requirements, that were applicable to conventional tramways and railways. Now these places are to be treated more harshly under the taxation system than other tramways. That is unfair and inconsistent, and I hope that the Minister will tonight be able to offer us some reassurance on the Government's intentions.

9.5 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I shall confine my remarks to the second order. I endorse entirely what the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) has just said; the fact that the national tramway museum is in his constituency serves only to add force to his comments.

Like the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), I, too, have had a letter from a constituent who has spent a lifetime in public transport in the west midlands. He retired recently and he spends a lot of his free time voluntarily helping out at the national tramway museum. Ken Sutton—he will not mind my naming him—writes to tell me that the effect of the order will be to add £35,000 a year to the running costs of the museum. Is that really what Ministers intended when they laid the order? If the order is approved tonight, heritage groups such as those who run the museum, largely voluntarily, will be treated far worse in taxation terms than profit-making tramway organisations in other parts of the country. That is manifestly unfair.

Earlier, the Minister twice said that he had been accused of introducing a bureaucratic imposition but that that description was untrue. Judging by the interventions in his speech, however, and by the speeches made since, that is what the House thinks of this order. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) asked the Minister—I suspect not with any great hope of success—to take the order away and to reintroduce it, if that is what the Government want, in prime time and on the Floor of the House so that we may adequately debate it and, just as importantly, so that proper consultations with those responsible for operating these places can be held.

Whether the Minister accepts it or not, this VAT order does entail bureaucratic impositions. Thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), I have been able to look at the press release published by the Department, where I find phrases such as "fun" or "historic" rides, "transport within theme parks", other places of "entertainment or historic interest", and so on. By no stretch of the imagination can the cost of moving someone from an airport car park to the terminal fall into any of those categories. I am left wondering why that addition was made. What impact will it have on legitimate business costs incurred at airports? To say the least, it is anomalous—I hope that the Minister

will accept that description—that airport car parking transfer charges are now to be subjected to VAT at 17.5 per cent.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell)—a former Transport Minister—intervened to ask about a couple of railway lines in his constituency. It is obvious that he was satisfied with the Minister's response, because he is no longer in his place.

I, too, want to ask some questions about the imposition of VAT on preserved railway lines. I appreciate that the Minister replied fairly straightforwardly to his hon. Friend. The Watercress line and the Keighley and Worth Valley light railway have been mentioned, and it seems that charges will not be imposed on either line. Does that apply throughout the preserved steam railway sector? Does it apply to all journeys? I very much doubt whether it does. I think that the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West accepted the Minister's assurance rather too quickly.

In the west midlands we have the Severn Valley railway. In the run-up to Christmas, the railway operates what it calls Santa specials. They start and finish at the same place. For much of the year, the Severn Valley railway operates dinner specials. Again, they start and finish at the same place. Passengers board the train at Kidderminster and they are taken to Bridgenorth. The locomotive runs around the train, as it were, and the train returns to Kidderminster. Would such a journey be subject to the imposition of VAT at 17.5 per cent? Would it come within the terms of the order? The Santa specials would fall within the terms of the order.

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): The Kent and East Sussex railway in my constituency runs similar Santa specials. In my youth, I was once a Santa Claus giving out presents to children. The trains go up and down the line, starting and finishing at the same place. The Wealden Pullman is an excellent example of what preserved railways are doing. Again, the train travels up and down the line and has no destination. A very agreeable meal is served on the train at a very agreeable price. The line does not make a profit, but it is an enormous tourist attraction. If the order is implemented, the railway will have to issue many different types of tickets for its many different activities. Surely that is nonsensical.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman illustrates the fact that the Treasury interferes in the preserved railway sector at its peril. I hope that the Minister will take up these fundamental questions. Will VAT be levied on such journeys?

I have another example of journeys that may be covered by the order unless he tells us, as I hope he will, that they will not. In the Birmingham area there is the Tyseley steam museum. The Flying Scotsman was there until comparatively recently. Are the journeys that are undertaken by locomotives in the museum to be subjected to VAT at 17.5 per cent. under the terms of the order? If they are, perhaps the Minister will explain why there has been no consultation with the organisations that I have mentioned.

The order will not do. The Treasury should not treat the House in this way. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, about specific pledges that were given on the extension of VAT to the journeys that have been mentioned. The Government should, for once, honour their pledges. They should take away the order and give us a proper opportunity to debate these matters in prime time. Equally importantly, they should give those responsible for levying charges and for advertising railway entertainments throughout the United Kingdom the opportunity to be consulted. Consultation has been conspicuous by its absence so far.

9.14 pm

Sir Peter Fry (Wellingborough): It is not often that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) and I agree—we have often debated with each other on transport matters—but I endorse his closing words: it is still the job of Members of Parliament to examine legislation that is presented to us, to see whether it deserves to be passed. I contend that it is clear tonight that many hon. Members, on both sides of the House, feel that we should not just happily pass the order in its present form, without further consideration.

It seems odd to me that an order that is supposed to implement the will of Parliament and clear up anomalies instead creates an enormous number of extra anomalies. We have not even had a definition of public transport. Before we can possibly pass the order, we should at least know what is meant by "public transport".

I declare an interest as adviser to the coach industry action group, although it has not approached me on this point. I have received a letter from the confederation of passenger transport. It is very concerned and tells me that coach operators provide exclusive tours, which, for VAT purposes, fall under the tour operators' margin scheme. It wants to know—it wrote to Customs and Excise on 14 December—whether its exemption will continue. I think that it is fully entitled to an answer from my hon. Friend the Minister tonight, or before the legislation comes into effect.

This is one of the most discriminatory pieces of legislation that I have ever seen. Why, for example, are we picking out the aviation industry for a further clobbering? The industry—entirely within the private sector—has had a series of measures imposed on it by the Government and there is clear discrimination against it, as outlined in article 3 of the order. I would have understood had the Government said that, henceforth, any form of transport—I shall use the words in the order—that was not

"primarily for the purpose of transporting passengers from one place to another"

would cease to be exempt from VAT, but I would not necessarily have agreed with it, because, as hon Members have said, there are many forms of transport that should not have VAT applied to them.

Why do the Government use that phraseology only in respect of article 3, which would allow a range of other transport activities to remain exempt from VAT? Why, for example, should a trip by sea be exempt when a trip on an aeroplane will not? Certain activities will become much more expensive. Because of the lack of consultation and the way in which the order has been introduced, it is no wonder that many responsible bodies are very concerned.

One of those bodies is British Airways. It feels strongly that it has been picked out as part of the aviation industry for extra taxation. One of the points that it has put to me—I sincerely hope that my hon. Friend the Minister

[Sir Peter Fry]

will respond to it when he winds up the debate—is that the order contravenes, or could, the sixth VAT directive, 77/388 EEC, which decrees that the imposition of VAT must not discriminate. I defy anybody to read the order and not conclude that there is strong discrimination, particularly against the aviation industry.

I have been in the House for more than 25 years, and a number of squalid measures have been introduced, from the Treasury and from Governments—both Labour and Conservative. There are not many occasions on which there has been a spontaneous reaction on both sides of the House to any particular measure. My hon. Friend and the Government should come clean. If they really want to remove the exemption in article 3, they should at least have the courage of consistency and apply it right across the board to transport. They have not done that, I suspect for the reason that we have heard tonight—that many hon. Members will get up and rightly point out the damage that will be done by the imposition of VAT on the national tramway museum and local railway lines.

If the Government expect the House to pass the measure, they should accept the suggestion that it should be withdrawn and be part of the Finance Bill and the debates that we shall have in future weeks. If my hon. Friend expects the House happily to let what I regard as a somewhat mean little measure go through tonight, he will do so without my support.

9.19 pm

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): The transport order is one of the daftest measures introduced by the Government in my time in the House, and that is saying something. It was made even worse when the Minister said that it is not the result of a European directive, so he is even deprived of being able to blame it on someone else. It is just another case of the Government building up a treasure chest to bribe the electorate in a pre-election Budget. That is the only possible explanation for their introducing this punitive measure.

I declare an interest as a sponsored member of the Transport and General Workers Union.

I fully agree with the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry) that we have not yet had a definition of public transport, especially in its usual sense, particularly coach travel. I take it that coach travel as part of a holiday package is not public transport in its usual sense and therefore would be subject to VAT. That is worrying, particularly for Scotland whose largest industry is tourism and as such is important to it. Many thousands of tourists come by coach from England and Europe and many tourists who fly into Scotland travel by coach rather than drive themselves around. Those tourists spend between one day and three weeks in Scotland. Such holidays do not come cheap. Most cost many hundreds of pounds and some cost thousands of pounds in total. The imposition of 17.5 per cent. VAT on such holidays will substantially reduce the number of tourists coming to Scotland, as well as England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Businesses, particularly small businesses in remote and rural areas will suffer a great loss of revenue.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman is wise to mention the importance of coach travel and the tourist industry in Scotland. Like me, he will be aware that the tourist industry, particularly coach tours and especially those from England, has been down considerably in the past 12 months, which is worrying.

Mr. Marshall: For once, I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. This order could be the final nail in the coffin for many businesses.

It is a two-way trade because coach tours go from Scotland south of the border. Some hotels survive only because they are on the coaching trail and some tourist attractions are viable only because of coach tours. Mystery tours and coach excursions have been referred to and they are popular, particularly with families and the elderly, especially those on low incomes and people who live in cities, such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, and other industrial centres of Great Britain. They want to get out of the city into the country and coaches provide a relatively cheap way of doing so.

Many tours will now disappear as a result of the imposition of VAT and all that it will achieve will be to deprive people of some pleasure and to deprive many people of their livelihood. It will be harder for small businesses, coach operators and drivers to remain in employment.

Many small towns and villages depend almost entirely on coach tours for their livelihood. Car traffic and passing trade is all very well but it is the coach tours that make businesses such as hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops and takeaway food centres profitable.

Some examples in the Scottish scene spring readily to mind. The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) will be familiar with them. Places such as Callander, Aberfoyle and Loch Katrine in the Trossachs are inundated with coach tours in summer and winter, especially at weekends. Woollen mills that sell the products of many rural areas also depend on coach tours and visitors to make a living: one thinks of Alva Glen and Culzean castle.

Coach tours to Blackpool illuminations are popular. There are hundreds of such tours, all of which will become uneconomic or will be put at risk as a result of the imposition of VAT. The National Trust for Scotland, too, has many hundreds of properties throughout Scotland—social attractions, historical attractions and garden attractions—and VAT will adversely affect all of them.

The whisky trail and visitor centres that attract many thousands of people from all over the world will be at risk too, because many of the visitors come by coach. It is worth noting that the whisky visitor centres employ more people than does the production of the whisky. That shows how important such attractions are to people and how important coach travel is. The measure is ill thought out and will turn out to be counter-productive. It discriminates especially against remote areas and against Scotland.

It is worrying, too, that VAT at 17.5 per cent. may be only the beginning. Can the Minister assure us that at some future date, if VAT is 22 per cent. or 25 per cent., the tax will not be increased? Of course he cannot. Things will be even worse when that day comes, as it surely will under the present Government.

Finally, can the Minister tell the House whether VAT will be levied on organised air trips to Lapland to see Santa Claus? Even Ebenezer Scrooge did not go that far. The order is not fair, just or logical, and the House should reject it.

9.26 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I perceive that the House is much exercised about excursions, but I shall speak about the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1994, and press as quickly as I can the point made by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) when she asked for extra-statutory concessions.

Some organisations have been literally caught on the hop by the introduction of the measure. I understand that the Paymaster General has introduced it so speedily to stop what may be called end-play situations, but it is right that attention should be paid to the predicament of legitimate organisations caught on the hop.

For example, I am a council member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, appointed by the Privy Council, and accordingly I am involved with the college's acquisition of new premises in exchange for its old premises. It has acquired, through a property sub-company, a property to be purchased, but has not yet signed a lease with that company, so it is literally caught between stepping stones.

The arrangement that the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons was entering into was absolutely legitimate when it embarked upon that course. It was using the law as it existed, and was setting out not to avoid VAT but to spread it. That formed part of its calculations in making the transaction.

It seems to me that the order is targeted at lease and leaseback arrangements rather than at ordinary property leasing arrangements—certainly, the Customs and Excise briefing document suggests that it is. Yet it does not seem to have been possible to draft the order tightly enough to draw in only lease and leaseback, so property arrangements have been drawn into the net as well. That has penalised many companies that have entered into legitimate arrangements and then been caught out.

The royal college is now caught in the worst of all worlds. It has acquired the property, without the leasing arrangements, as a straight purchase. Had it done so outright as a straight purchase it could have recovered one third of the VAT , but now no VAT can be recovered. As a consequence of the order, the college will have to pay much more VAT to Customs and Excise than it would otherwise have done. I cannot believe that it is the intention to penalise persons caught on the hop in that way.

For those who are so caught, I suggest that the fair way forward is for them to be placed on a footing that leaves Customs and Excise receiving what it would have done had that part of the VAT remained recoverable. The RCVS would have been able to recover a third of its VAT. Under the order, Customs and Excise will receive 50 per cent. more than it would have done for a straight purchase. If the Treasury should have its due, it should not be the beneficiary of a 50 per cent. windfall.

As I understand it, the Minister has the power to make extra-statutory concessions. The number of companies or organisations caught in that way cannot be large, so I would like from my hon. Friend an assurance that he will entertain requests for an extra-statutory concession so that the injustice can be corrected and the genuine nature of transactions such as the one that RCVS has entered into can be reflected. Members of the RCVS are honourable people doing honourable things. The arrangement is not a chipping arrangement or a short cut; it was done in all good faith. That ought to be reflected in the actions of the Treasury tonight.

9.30 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I do not want to raise the question of theme parks and so on, but I understand from correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister that the Isle of Wight steam railway will not be covered by the order because it charges for its tickets, not for admission. However, it is to the Isle of Wight that I wish to speak because we rely on our ferries to come and go from the island.

I am worried about the information given out by Customs and Excise about the order. Paragraph 3(b) says:

"in any motor vehicle between a car park"—

or its vicinity—

"and an airport passenger terminal".

That seems to me to be a hop, skip and a jump to transport from a car park to a ferry terminal, and that could include Ryde pier. That worries me enormously.

Paragraph 9 of the information says that the changes are unlikely to affect the present treatment of boat trips or ro-trains. It does not say that they will not. It does not say that they do not. It says that they are unlikely to affect it. That sort of language terrifies me when it comes from the Treasury. Paragraph 12 refers to pleasure flights including hot air balloon rides. I was puzzled as to why the Government thought that they could raise so much money from hot air balloons. I realised when I listened to the speeches of the Liberal Democrats that there was a whole new means of travel here and tremendous income was to be gained from hot air balloons.

As I understand it, the French and British Governments reached agreement on the VAT treatment of the channel link. If that train happened to go into Disneyland, it would become VATable under the order. That is extraordinary. Paragraph 12 refers to experience of flying. What about experience of boating? As I speak, the British Marine Industries Federation is putting on the international boat show. It has experience of boating. One can hear the tills clicking away over at the Treasury as they say, "Aha, another means of income." That is very worrying.

The nub of the matter is that we all know in the House that the moment we depart from a zero rate on VAT on anything within the EC structure, we are stuck with it. We can never go back to less than 5 per cent. My hon. Friend is either being a little disingenuous, has been misled by his officials or is playing with fire—or he is doing all three. By moving the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994 he is inviting the EC to say that the United Kingdom has departed from VAT at a zero rate on public transport. It will rule that we must impose VAT at the minimum rate of 5 per cent. on all public transport. That is what really worries me. I believe that the price of freedom from taxation on the Isle of Wight ferries is eternal vigilance over the Treasury.

9.33 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I will endeavour to answer the many questions raised during the debate. I think that I can give significant reassurance, especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field). I promise him that there is no intention of applying value added tax at the standard rate to the ferry services on which his

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

constituency relies. The essential feature of the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994 is to return the situation to what Parliament intended when it granted zero-rating to public transport. We have drifted away from that and some forms of transport—trips in hot air balloons to name but one—have come under the umbrella of public transport and have claimed and been given zero-rated status when that was clearly not intended.

I find it a little strange that the Opposition should complain about features of the two orders which are designed to end loopholes and anomalies, when their entire shadow Budget was founded on the pretence that they could fund their expenditure ambitions through windfall taxes and ending loopholes.

Ms Primarolo: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. I am responding to points that have already been made, if the hon. Lady will forgive me.

When the Government introduce measures to end loopholes and anomalies, the Opposition complain about that in detail.

Ms Primarolo: On the question of primary legislation—

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I will come to the hon. Lady's point in a minute, if I may just finish my argument. The Opposition complain about confusion in the orders, which I can well understand on their part, because they are in a good deal of confusion over their VAT ambitions. I find it strange that some of them at least wish to put VAT on education, yet they resist measures that return the zero-rating privilege for the public transport sector to what Parliament originally intended.

Ms Primarolo: The Minister will surely have noticed during tonight's debate that there is considerable disquiet on both sides of the House about the proposals in the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994. Given the Chancellor's promise to the House that zero-rated VAT would be removed only by primary legislation, will he tell us why he cannot withdraw the transport order tonight and bring it back as an amendment to the Finance Bill, when it can be considered thoroughly, proper consultation can be undertaken and every hon. Member can satisfy himself of the exact intention?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I already pointed out in an intervention on the hon. Lady that all Governments, including a Labour Government, have used secondary legislation to make adjustments and alterations at the margin to the coverage and extent of value added tax. In 1976 and 1977, the Labour Government introduced exactly analogous measures—including one which I mentioned as an example—to remove from zero-rating certain items of food and confectionery. We are merely using the same methods of secondary legislation as were employed by the hon. Lady's party when it was last in office.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am sorry, but I owe it to my hon. Friends and to other hon. Members who raised matters in the debate to try to respond.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my hon. Friend give way, as I was not able to raise this matter during the debate? I am grateful for his courtesy. Can he tell me whether the Ruislip lido railway, which runs within a recreational area, will be subject to standard rate VAT? One can either take a round trip and end up where one began, in which case I presume that one would be subjected to that rate, or one can go to the other end of the line and get off, in which case one would not. The latter journey would be zero-rated because it would be assumed to be transport, even though it is a distance of only three quarters of a mile down the line. Can my hon. Friend tell me, beyond peradventure, what the position will be?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend has not given me sufficient details to make a snap judgment about whether a facility in his constituency falls within the order. If he writes me a letter giving further details, I shall respond in due course.

In her opening remarks, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) suggested that the buildings order would be retrospective. I have already assured her that it will not be. The order took effect from 30 November 1994, so leases entered into before that date are not affected. She also asked whether the provisions could be circumvented by use of a third party. On the information that she gave in her opening remarks, I would say that that would not constitute tax avoidance and would not be caught by the order. If she wants further details, she should write to me.

I understand the close interest which my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) has taken in the national tramway museum. Admission charges to museums without transport are already liable to the standard rate. It was never intended to provide a tax advantage to places that happen to include, or take the form of, a ride. We are merely returning the museum to equal treatment with all other museums and places of interest. Nor will it mean different treatment for places of interest and places of entertainment, which would give rise to difficult borderline cases if we tried to distinguish between them.

Let us imagine, for example, a theme or safari park that sets up a mock Jurassic park attraction. Some would say that it is a matter of entertainment, while others would say that it is a matter of interest or education. In dealing with legislation, it must therefore be right to provide rules that go across the board and deal with all places of entertainment, museums and theme or safari parks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) mentioned the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. He has written to me about that difficult case. I assure him that organisations or businesses caught innocently by the order may be granted an extra-statutory concession. However, I understand that that organisation tried to enter into an arrangement that clearly falls foul of the anti-avoidance provision. Indeed, it was the intention that before the cut-off date it should take advantage of a lease and leaseback arrangement, so I cannot assure my hon. Friend that we shall necessarily deal with it as sympathetically as those caught innocently. I shall look at the issue again, however, because of my hon. Friend's interest.

A number of other hon. Members, particularly the hon. Members for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) and for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) spoke as though all coach and bus transport would suddenly become standard-rated. I assure them that that is not the intention. Indeed, many of the types of transport mentioned in the debate are already standard-rated. For instance, hot air balloons that go up with fewer than 12 passengers are already standard-rated. Therefore no change is in prospect.

Mr. Snape: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No, I am sorry, but I want to try to answer my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Sir P. Fry), who asked whether air transport was, in principle, dealt with differently from surface transport. My hon. Friend would agree that a journey that goes from A to B has elements of public transport about it, because passengers could be transported not for pleasure but for the genuine motive of being transported from one place to another. In cases of pleasure flights round the Bay of Biscay in Concorde or whatever, that clearly cannot—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [16 December].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1994 (S.I.,1994, No.3013), dated 29th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994 (S.I.,1994, No.3014), dated 29th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.—[*Mr. Bates.*]

The House divided: Ayes 236, Noes 198.

Division No. 36] **[9.45 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy

Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Simon Burns.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Stephen Byers.

Question accordingly agreed to.

PETITION

Disport Project

9.59 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) and myself, I beg leave to present a petition to the House, signed by close on 10,000 of our constituents, in support of a very important group in Monklands. This group deals with people who are disabled and who are involved in sport, and it has found that its funding will be reduced so radically that it may not be able to continue its work. The petition states:

To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Residents of Monklands District

Sheweth

That the Disport Project has been very successful in assisting disabled in Monklands but its future is endangered by lack of resources.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Scotland to ensure the maintenance of adequate resources for the continued running of this Project.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, M. Wilkinson, 72 Craigend Drive.

I beg leave to present the Petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Community Care (Essex)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.1 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): I begin by thanking all my colleagues from Essex who have turned up tonight to support the debate about Essex social services. I particularly thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Banks) who has sat on the Treasury Bench and therefore will not be able to contribute to the debate, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton). By their attendance in the Chamber tonight, they show that they care for the vulnerable people in their constituencies, for whom they have worked assiduously for many years.

Tonight I wish to expose the real cost of Labour and Liberal control of Essex county council. That cost is measured in cuts in care, in residential homes and in home help. Those cuts impact on the most vulnerable people in society: the old and infirm, disabled people, children who are in need and at risk, and, most cruelly of all, the terminally ill.

Essex county council received more money from the Government for community care than any other council, yet others are delivering community care successfully. We must ask why Essex is not able to succeed to the same extent. Tonight we will reveal the truly callous nature of socialism. I freely acknowledge that it is not callous by intent: the intentions are often good, but the impact of policies is often detrimental and brings about cuts such as the ones that we have seen in Essex which fall cruelly upon those who are most vulnerable. They are therefore callous policies; there can be no other interpretation.

In Essex, the facts are quite clear and unarguable. Labour and Liberal councillors lost £8.5 million from the social service budget through incompetence, improper control of the budget and bad policies. Those Labour and Liberal councillors are now making our vulnerable constituents pay for their mistakes. The county council should now take money from its £28 million reserves to restore levels of service this year. It should cut its profligacy rather than cutting care levels next year.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): My hon. Friend brings news to the debate. Hon. Members will recall that, before Christmas, we were talking about £25 million-worth of balances. My hon. Friend may not be aware of it, but Essex county council responded in my local newspaper to our joint request to release the balances. I have the report in front of me, but I will summarise it.

The council agreed that £25 million was a large sum, but it said that it needed the money for various contingencies. They said that if it was a very bad winter there would be major problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and I were brought up in the foothills of the Pennines, where winters can be a bit nippy. We can tell the House that one can get an awful lot of snow shovels for £25 million. One can also get an awful lot of care for £25 million. We want to see some care delivered to our constituents.

Dr. Spink: It will be a very bad winter for the vulnerable people in our constituencies as a result of Liberal and Labour policies in Essex.

[Dr. Spink]

I quote from a letter dated 6 January from David Brackenbury, the chief executive of Southend trust hospital:

"Essex County Council Social Services Department are experiencing budgeting problems . . . The current position is that we have 24 patients who have been assessed as needing social care support and being fully capable of being discharged from hospital who have not been discharged simply because Social Services have refused to provide the appropriate package of care on financial grounds. This is an escalating position which started in late November and is growing at the rate of 2 or 3 patients per week."

That results in the phenomenon of bed blocking, and blocked beds are lost beds.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): Is my hon. Friend aware that on Monday I visited the casualty unit at Colchester general hospital, where I was informed that staff were unable to admit patients into beds because they could not discharge geriatric patients who were occupying those beds, due to lack of community care? The problem is already arising as a result of mismanagement by Essex county council.

Dr. Spink: I am delighted to hear that intervention. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark).

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. While we are talking about bed blocking, is he aware that, in Southend, Essex county council care homes that were renovated recently at great expense were closed in November due to lack of funds? My constituents wrote to me saying that they were closed due to lack of Government funding. I wrote to the director of social services at Chelmsford, and he confirmed that it was not lack of Government funding, which had been adequate; it was simply overspending by the Liberal-Labour council.

Dr. Spink: Those two interventions prove my case. It is not just social service client groups that are suffering from Labour and Liberal mismanagement. It is not just the taxpayers in Essex; it is everyone in Essex who may have the misfortune of needing hospital care over the coming months. We shall all suffer as a result of Labour and Liberal mismanagement.

Castle Point borough council had budgeting difficulties in the early 1990s, when budgets were overspent by £2.4 million.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The books were fiddled.

Dr. Spink: The hon. Gentleman makes a seated intervention, and he is right. The books were fiddled, I am told, by the treasurer of the borough council, who lost his job as a result.

The budget overspend took place without the councillors' knowledge, and was not a result of profligate policies, as was the case in Essex. The borough treasurer moved funds between various accounts quite improperly. He covered up the problem, and left the borough council's employment as a result.

Castle Point councillors—*[Interruption.]* yes, they were Tory councillors—and council staff then had to repair the situation. The councillors took a cut in their allowances—they did the honourable thing—and council staff took a 6 per cent. cut in their wages. Everyone, from the chief executive right down to the cleaner, took a pay cut.

Castle Point councillors took every penny from their reserves and spent the money to support service levels, as Essex should do. They also cut staff numbers dramatically. They took all that difficult action to minimise the impact.

Mr. Mackinlay *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I do not recall calling the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) yet.

Dr. Spink: They took difficult action to minimise the impact of the budgetary problem on the people they represented. Unlike Castle Point councillors, the Essex Labour and Liberal councillors have not done the honourable thing. Indeed, they are increasing social service management salaries and wages by a massive amount. The people of Essex resent their double standards and hypocrisy.

When Castle Point had a budgeting difficulty, members of the Labour and Liberal parties said that, as £2.4 million had been lost, the councillors involved should resign and repay the money. Now that Labour and Liberal councillors have lost £8.5 million, their political friends—and the councillors themselves—have forgotten all about those calls for resignations and repayment. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) persists in making seated interventions. Let us hear him call for the resignation of his colleagues in Essex. He will not do so.

Labour now even has the gall to rub salt in the wounds of vulnerable people by making unnecessary cuts in services, but refusing to use its ample balance of £28 million. That is shameful, but typical of Labour councillors.

Conservative Councillor Joe Pike speaks for the people of Essex. He really cares, and he is competent—unlike the Labour chairman of social services, who, sadly, is floundering. He is following a hard-left, dogmatic, socialist agenda. That is the major problem in Essex. Brin Jones of Langdon Hills has explained that the Labour chairman of social services wasted the extra money given by the Government on hare-brained schemes.

Those daft socialist schemes, which are robbing vulnerable people in Essex, include a blanket home care charging policy that does not take into account ability to pay. That scheme resulted in a loss of £1.25 million. The council sent young thugs and burglars abroad on holiday; they were sent on Center Parc holidays, accompanied by very happy and enormously grateful social workers. Incidentally, the lucky social workers did not always do their job of supervising the young criminals very well: one of those young criminals spent a few days on a robbery spree in a Center Parc, totally out of control.

Essex spent thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money sending council officers abroad—to Canada, for instance—to recruit expensive foreign social workers to tell us Essex people how to run our lives. As if we British people were not capable of caring for ourselves, our old and frail people and our children! As if we British were so impoverished of skills, abilities and enthusiasm that we needed to go begging abroad to fill simple social worker jobs! What rubbish. In their expensive foreign recruitment

policy, Labour and Liberal councillors reveal their abject contempt for the people of Essex—and the people of Essex will show what they think of them at the next election.

Then there is the £368,000 that Essex Labour councillors have spent on new office-based social service posts. Those are not posts at the sharp end of caring for real people; they are very questionable posts, which some would describe as politically correct, relating to the European Union social chapter. Essex is even spending £100,000 on employing psychologists. It might be said that that is the job of social services, but the psychologists are intended not to help vulnerable people in Essex but to help social services staff themselves—managers and social workers who claim to be highly stressed. If Essex social service managers and workers are so unstable that they require professional psychologists to help them, it is little wonder that they get it so wrong so often, and waste so much taxpayers' money.

Let me give just one example—there are many—of social services' wasting money by their errors. A child was taken into care in my constituency at a cost of over £100,000. When the case came to court, Essex social services were severely criticised by the judge, who told them that they had no reason, cause or right to remove the child. The child was immediately restored to his parent.

Mr. Mackinlay: A Tory council was in power then.

Dr. Spink: There are other such cases in Essex. I had a meeting with the director of social services in Essex in December.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Tories were in control.

Dr. Spink: The director of social services told me that the social services department had been given a reasonable amount of money by the Government. But he also said that social services had experienced budgeting difficulties—*[Interruption.]*—and there had been an overspend—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Member for Thurrock to remain quiet for the rest of the evening.

Dr. Spink: I am indebted to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The director assured me that this mismanagement would not recur next year. He subsequently wrote a four-page article in the *Evening Echo* of 20 December, mentioning nowhere that Essex had received inadequate money from the Government—he did not even hint at it. He simply referred to an overspend on the budget which Essex had incurred, and the need to get the budget "back on track". During his meeting with me, he informed me that last year's social services budget had been underspent, so this year he had followed the Labour and Liberal policy of "stimulating spending" in the private sector. Presumably he did this to force up spending, because the council did not want to underspend for a second year, thinking, rightly, that that would run the risk of the budget being cut. That is Labour and Liberal policy: take as much as they can from people and spend it profligately.

The director also told me that Essex had followed a policy of awarding contracts to the best tender from the private sector for home placements. Most other county councils capped costs at county council level, plus a small additional percentage. The director said that this was perhaps a wrong policy, which would be reconsidered in future, and that it had certainly caused a haemorrhaging of funds from the county council.

Finally, I want to concentrate on caring, which is what this debate is all about. I quote the director's own memorandum of 8 November:

"Some people will not get all the care that they are assessed as requiring".

I believe that this policy may put the council outside its statutory obligations to my vulnerable constituents. It certainly puts socialist and Liberal councillors outside their moral obligations to their electorate.

I therefore call on the Labour and Liberal parties in Essex to use a small part of our reserves—it is our money, and the £28 million is ample for the purpose—to help vulnerable people this year. They should also cut the number of jobs in management and administration, and cut salaries, too. I suggest that they cut them by 6 per cent.—the Castle Point precedent. But they must make no cuts at all at the sharp end of caring.

It is disgraceful that not a single Liberal Member has come to the Chamber for tonight's debate. That just shows how much they care. I give way now to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. David Amess.

10.17 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) has done the House, Essex and the country a great service by describing in graphic detail the consequences when the two socialist parties, Labour and the alliance, share a political bed. People suffer.

What the socialists in Essex have done is disgraceful. I have suggested before that they should resign because of their incompetence. If they are not prepared to resign—I have looked into these procedures—I shall attempt to activate a process that will lead to the impeachment of these county councillors. Lord Melville was impeached, and I see no reason not to call on those procedures again if the councillors are not prepared to resign.

It is well known that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had the privilege of visiting my constituency last spring, when he also visited one of the finest hospitals in the country—Basildon hospital, where he opened two new wards in the new maternity unit. He would be horrified to see the evil consequences of socialist mismanagement in Essex.

While we still had a good Conservative council in Essex, in 1993, there was an agreed procedure for the assessment of the care in the community needs of hospital patients who were ready for discharge. In October 1994, however, the Essex social services department took the unilateral decision to review its approach to meeting the community care needs of patients as a result of overspending in October. What incompetence. It had overspent only half way through the year. No one was consulted about the decision. As a result of mismanagement, there are 77 beds—

Mr. Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It had better be a proper one.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

Mr. Mackinlay: I think it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) gave way to the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess). You did not call the hon. Member for Basildon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that I am correct.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is clear that the hon. Member is feeling pretty fresh this evening. With respect, the Chair decides who is called, not the hon. Member for Thurrock.

Mr. Mackinlay: But the hon. Member for Castle Point gave way to the hon. Member for Basildon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) said is entirely for him. I called the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess).

Mr. Amess: As a result of Essex county council's mismanagement, there are 77 beds blocked in Basildon. That is having enormous repercussions for treatment in the accident and emergency unit and the way that patients are being cared for. Socialist county councillors in Essex and socialist Members should be ashamed of themselves in view of the anxiety that is being caused to many of our constituents in Essex.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will share our message, which was so eloquently delivered by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point, and that socialist county councillors in Essex will resign, so that we can return to good, sensible Conservative control of Essex county council.

10.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) has led a positive cavalry charge for common sense in community care for his constituents and for the people of Essex generally. With him have ridden my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) and for Rochford (Dr. Clark).

I acknowledge also the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Harwich (Mr. Sproat), for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has looked on. Also present has been my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton), the Leader of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has been in his place. Convention does not permit him to participate, but he has spoken, telephoned and written to me on behalf of his constituents on this important subject.

Our song tonight is one of a successful policy that has been marred by poor local implementation. Community care is one of the Government's great success stories. It is popular with the public, who are flocking to apply for its benefits. It is saluted by all experts, all observers and all parties. It has been acknowledged by every independent monitor to have got off to a good start.

Local authorities asked for and were given responsibility for the policy's implementation, and on the whole they have done well. That has been in no small part due to the generous funding that the Government have provided for the early years of the new policy. It is for local authorities, which welcomed the introduction of the reforms, to exercise good financial control to ensure that they deliver good quality, cost-effective services through the greatly increased resources that have been made available.

That is not only my view for it is the view of the independent and authoritative Audit Commission. In its report it warned of the need for better financial control to handle fluctuations in demand and to ensure that the financial consequences of past commitments are fully understood. Significantly, it called on local councils to make better use of independent sector provision, which is often better in quality and cost than state provision. That is vital if more flexible services, often linked to devolved budgets, are ready to take root. As the Audit Commission rightly says, the large sums involved must be handled with maximum efficiency and effectiveness to provide the best possible services.

We must take to heart too the lessons set out in today's Audit Commission report, "Paying the Piper", which shows the potential for savings of about £500 million a year if local government managed its pay bill better. The Audit Commission points out that £500 million could be saved without cutting front-line services. That is a lot of money, which could be available for services such as community care in Essex as in any other authority in this country.

I believe that we have funded community care fairly and responsibly, and nowhere is that more true than in Essex. When I hear that Essex socialist and Liberal councillors are complaining about a lack of resources, I thank heaven that, last May, my electors in Battersea ensured the continuation of a Conservative council in Wandsworth.

What are the inadequate resources? A few hundred thousand pounds? A couple of million? One or 2 per cent. above inflation? Or has there been a cut? No, there has been a massive increase of 22 per cent. this year for Essex in the total social services allocation, and an extra £32 million.

In 1991, Essex had social services resources of £89.54 million. This year, it has £174.89 million. Next year, it will have £192.35 million. Essex has gained in cash terms and in real terms. It gained £3 million from our changes to the distribution of the special transitional grant. It gained £6.2 million from the review of the standard spending assessment. In other words, Essex's slice of the national cake is £9.2 million higher this year than it would have been under the old allocation formula. Essex is not a loser.

Let me tell my hon. Friends, I have some sympathy with the director of social services in Essex when I read the report that he wrote for the social services committee, which, coincidentally, met today. As I understand it, he identified pressures on his budget of some £1.5 million to £1.9 million, and currently projects an overspend of some £1.4 million for this year. He seems to be taking a number of prudent measures to reduce that pressure. I must ask my hon. Friends, who must ask their elected councillors in Essex: why does he have such pressures? He does not appear to be helped by the policies being pursued by his political masters. Let me give some examples; my hon. Friends have given others.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Bowis: No. This is my hon. Friend's debate, and it is for me to answer my hon. Friend's points.

I understand that one of the first things that the new county administration did on coming into office was to introduce a blanket charge for home care of some £4.25 per week, regardless of how many hours' service was provided. I understand that it is estimated that that change alone has probably lost the council some £1.25 million in income.

Secondly, there has been an increase in bureaucracy, with the appointment of administrative staff to the tune of some £368,000. Thirdly, the council seems to have stopped reviewing its homes and selling off those that are not up to standard to reinvest in the social services budget. If, as I suspect, that is a symptom of a reluctance to use the independent sector, which frequently gives better value for money, more choice and more flexibility to individual users, that is regrettable and short-sighted. Fourthly, I am informed that the unwillingness to do business with the independent sector is even more marked in relation to domiciliary and day care, where there appears to be a dogmatic preference for the in-house services.

Those are the policies that give social services a bad name. They give poor value for money. I wonder how many of the new county councillors will go out and explain to elderly and vulnerable people in Essex, who are looking to them for help and support, that the projected expenditure in 1994-95 on support services is likely to be £1.3 million above the original budget, whereas, by chance, an almost identical amount seems to have been taken out of field work services and adult residential care for disabled and mentally ill people.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Bowis: Let them explain that to the people of Essex.

Mr. Hinchliffe *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Bowis: The convention is, I believe, that, if any hon. Member wishes to intervene, he should have the courtesy to check with the hon. Member who initiated the Adjournment debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point for his excellent speech and my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon for his. I am not sure that I can promise him the impeachment. I am not sure, even with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House present, that I would know the procedures on which the House might embark if it were even to consider that.

I tell my hon. Friends to take back to the people of Essex the Government's commitment to care for those in need. Reassure them that we have put our money where our policy is for community care. Remind them that its implementation is the responsibility of the county councillors whom they elected. Tell them the truth, the facts and the figures.

Tell the people of Essex the truth about the resources that the Government have provided and the way in which those resources are being managed by the elected councillors. Tell them about the priorities of those councillors who put bureaucracy before services and dogma before people in need. Tell them that, if Essex is not delivering on its social services, the fault lies within Essex and at the doors of the leaders of their county council, and invite the people of Essex to hold those leaders to account.

10.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful to be called briefly to make one specific comment. I am surprised that the Minister has made no reference to the fact that, as I understand it, in January 1993 his Department expressed concern about the lack of preparation of Essex county council social services department for the community care changes. Will he confirm that point, say why that concern was expressed and say whether it is true that, at that stage, the Department of Health threatened to move in directly to manage the community care changes in Essex, at a time when I understand that the Conservatives were in control of Essex county council?

10.31 pm

Mr. Bowis: What I confirm is that many local authorities sought and received assistance, advice and guidance at the time of the implementation of the policy, and, at the time of it coming into force, it was up and running in Essex as elsewhere. What we are talking about tonight is the way in which the massive increase in resources that the Government have provided for the county of Essex has not been provided for community care and the people in need of such care.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 19 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

MI5

1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Director General of MI5 is expected to retire.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): As has always been planned, the Director General of the Security Service is expected to retire in February 1996, when she will have completed four years in the post.

Mr. Winnick: Are there any grounds for extending her employment in that position? Does the director general of MI5 now accept that when she was in a responsible position in the organisation, but not yet director general, the decision taken under her supervision to target my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) and Patricia Hewitt was wholly unjustified? As I understand it, the Government no longer want to justify it.

Mr. Howard: I have answered the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. As to the second part, there is absolutely no substance whatever in his allegation.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that now is not the time to be discussing the retirement of the head of MI5? Will he accept the congratulations of this House on the vigilant work that she and her department have done, with the exposure of an individual who was asked to leave the United Kingdom in the past week and who is a citizen of the Russian Federation?

Mr. Howard: We have a great deal for which every citizen of this country should be grateful in respect of the work of the Security Service.

Security Industry

2. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals for statutory regulation of the security industry.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): We have no plans for statutory regulations, but I am looking again at policies in this area and await with interest the outcome of the Home Affairs Select Committee's current inquiry.

Mr. McCartney: The Minister knows that for the past 10 years I have been involved in a campaign to expose the activities of those in organised crime who have been infiltrating the security industry, particularly in the leisure sector. Organised crime is involved in jobs, prostitution and protection rackets. Was it not extraordinary that just before Christmas Conservative central office, through its security company, recruited one Bob King who had just served 15 years for armed robbery to work as a security guard at central office? Does that not prove that infiltration of the industry has gone right to the top, including the Government?

Mr. Maclean: If the hon. Gentleman has any suggestions of irregularity or criminality, the police are the appropriate body to which to make his complaints. I have given evidence on the security industry before the Select Committee. I repeat that I am looking at policies in this area, and I await with interest the conclusions of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the private sector has an important part to play in the security industry and is making a major contribution to the fight against crime?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Crime is dealt with by the police in their public role, and the private security industry has a vital and major part to play in all the various sectors—technology, cash in transit, man guarding, and so on. Ordinary citizens, members of the public and local authorities working in partnership with the police and with the private sector also have a key part to play.

Mr. Trimble: Does the Minister recall that it was because there was evidence that organised crime was penetrating security firms in Northern Ireland that the Government put legislation on the statute book to regulate private security firms there, so there can be no objection in principle to extending that legislation to the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Maclean: I am not suggesting that there is an objection in principle. We must look at the practicalities and try to pinpoint which sectors, if any, of the security industry face problems. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that every facet of the security industry, including locksmiths and those who install alarms or closed circuit television systems—or indeed those who work in other areas of the industry where there has never been the slightest suggestion of irregularities or problems—should have a massive bureaucratic system imposed on them. That is why I am keen to find out whether the Select Committee has delineated any areas where there may be problems. I am also keen to see what options and solutions may be available to deal with perceived problems.

Closed Circuit Television

3. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to announce which bids for closed circuit television funding will be supported.

Mr. Howard: The successful bids for CCTV funding will be announced in March.

Mrs. Knight: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the concern of many of my constituents in Erewash that bids from cities for closed circuit television will take preference over bids from towns—a concern emphasised on many recent occasions—which has resulted in funds going to the cities of Nottingham or Derby but not to the Erewash towns of Ilkeston and Long Eaton, which lie in between? Can he assure me that in this instance towns will not play second fiddle yet again to cities?

Mr. Howard: I can indeed give that assurance and I hope that it will go some way towards alleviating the concerns that my hon. Friend has expressed. I know how resolutely she works for the interests of her constituents. We have made it clear that the needs of smaller communities will be given particular attention as we assess the bids, which will, of course, be dealt with on their merits.

Mr. McWilliam: Does the Home Secretary accept that the funds available for the scheme—excellent though it is—are massively inadequate in terms of the demand for it? Is he aware that there is great concern among the business community of the Team Valley trading estate in Gateshead that its scheme should go ahead as it will not cost the Government or the local authority any money to run it once it is established?

Mr. Howard: The private sector, local authorities and other agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the significant benefits that closed circuit television can deliver and are contributing to the costs themselves. It is a very cost-effective way of dealing with crime. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who will know of the great success that has been achieved in the city centre of Newcastle, will be the first to accept that.

War Crimes Unit

4. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to close down the war crimes unit at New Scotland Yard.

Mr. Maclean: This is a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. The unit is currently funded until 31 March 1995. It is expected that police investigations will be completed by that date.

Mr. Townsend: I thank the Minister for that reply. Does he not feel that employing 11 senior and experienced detectives under a chief superintendent at a cost of £5 million to look at alleged crimes in remote corners of eastern Europe more than 50 years ago represents a rather curious set of priorities?

Mr. Maclean: No, I do not. The House voted overwhelmingly for the action that has been taken. I believe that, where alleged offences are committed, we are under a duty to investigate them and see them through to the end. If there is sufficient evidence, the decision will be made by the Attorney-General, assisted by the Director of Public Prosecutions, on whether to prosecute. To put the cost into perspective, some £5.2 million over three years compares with Metropolitan police funding equivalent to some £5 billion over the same period.

Mr. Janner: I thank the Minister for that answer, which I am sure will be accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House. Will he kindly tell the House how many cases are currently under investigation, how many cases have reached the Attorney-General and when he expects a decision to be made as to who will be prosecuted?

Mr. Maclean: Some 369 cases have been investigated by the Metropolitan police war crimes unit. The Crown Prosecution Service has decided not to prosecute in 236 of those cases, 112 people subject to investigation have died and 21 investigations remain with the police. Nine cases are currently with the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether prosecutions should be brought. I am afraid that I cannot tell the hon. and learned Gentleman when a decision will be made on those, nor would he expect me to be able to influence, speed up or delay those decisions in any way.

Mr. Jessel: Is not the murder of 6 million people a completely different kind of crime from the murder of just 6,000, 600 or 60 people? Can my hon. Friend confirm that the overwhelming majority of the House to which he referred was in the ratio of about four to one?

Mr. Maclean: If I were one of the 60 or the six I might not necessarily take that view. However, these are more like Second Reading questions which have already been settled. The House decided by an overwhelming majority to set up the war crimes unit and to pass the legislation and we are under a duty to see that through. The task is well on the way to completion and it would be erroneous to abandon it as we approach the final hurdle.

Constitutional Reform

5. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals his Department has concerning British constitutional reforms.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): We have no current plans for constitutional reform in Great Britain. We believe that our present constitutional arrangements serve their respective purposes well.

Ms Quin: Does the Minister realise that there is deep public concern about the centralised quango-ridden system operated by the Government, and that by turning their face against any democratic reform the Government will win no friends? Would the Minister care to meet members of the Campaign for a Northern Assembly or members of the North of England Assembly of Local Authorities, both of which believe that regional government will not only be democratic and bring greater subsidiarity, but will help to bring about economic recovery and economic development in regions such as the north?

Mr. Baker: The Government do not believe that constitutional reforms are either needed or wanted by the majority of the British people. As to the hon. Lady's

suggestions about regional devolved government, those are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] We take a very different view from that which has led to the proposals for regional government being put forward by the Opposition, which are based on the needs of the Labour party and would lead to the devaluation and subversion of the authority of the Palace of Westminster and the break-up of the United Kingdom: as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said—teenage madness.

Dame Angela Rumbold: Does my hon. Friend agree that Britain already has sufficient in the way of local government and bodies which represent people at local level and that the only constitutional reform that is required in a country of this size—quite small—is to have rather more local local government and not to indulge in regional government and other constitutional reform which would inevitably result in nothing but further expense for the poor British taxpayer?

Mr. Baker: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The devolution proposals put forward by the Labour party are, in the words of *The Guardian*, which is no supporter of the Government,

"an earthquake set to ripple through the land."

Mr. William Ross: Will the Minister give an assurance that, whatever constitutional positions may be arrived at throughout the United Kingdom, the authority will lie totally within the competence of the House?

Mr. Baker: I can certainly agree with and give the answer yes to that question.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: If we had devolution in Scotland and Wales, regional assemblies in England and a tax on the monarchy, would that not destroy the United Kingdom as we know it today?

Mr. Baker: Yes.

Mr. Salmond: Is not the Prime Minister, in his claim that the Union is the best possible arrangement, beginning to resemble the boy on the burning deck? What evidence does the Minister have for his claim that the majority of people in Scotland do not want constitutional change? Does he understand why there is such substantial irritation in Scotland and Wales with a Prime Minister who claims that this place knows better how to run those nations than the people of Scotland and Wales?

Mr. Baker: These are matters for Parliament. Scotland is a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland. I concur with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who described this as a most dangerous proposal and the most dangerous proposition to be put before the British nation.

Sir Donald Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the committee of the Council of Europe that deals with regional matters, which proposes the establishment of a regional assembly in Strasbourg, agreed on Monday that the current arrangements for the United Kingdom fit well into the pattern of regional government throughout Europe?

Mr. Baker: I agree with what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Beith: How can the Minister claim that Home Office Ministers are against all constitutional change when the Home Secretary is the biggest constitutional innovator around? Was it not he who sought to centralise control of police authorities, but was stopped by the other place? Was it not he who sought central control of the administration of the courts, and is it not he who is trying to rewrite the doctrine of ministerial responsibility so that Ministers are merely accountable—not responsible—for matters for which even "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" states that they are responsible?

Mr. Baker: My colleagues and I entirely reject that suggestion from a Member of Parliament who proposes a federal union in Europe which would have precisely the opposite effect.

Mr. Batiste: Is not the real motive of those who argue for regional government in England connected with the fact that they are afraid to face up to the consequences of the West Lothian question? Is that not a very bad reason to mess about with English local government—just to retain extra seats for Scottish Members of Parliament?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Opposition Members have given no answer to the West Lothian question either before or now.

Mr. Straw: May I invite the Minister to agree with the following words? The words

"decentralisation to the provinces of England would result in local communities recovering a large measure of the responsibilities they have lost in so many spheres."

were the exact words that the Home Secretary's predecessor, now Chancellor of the Exchequer, used in a Bow Group pamphlet that he wrote recommending elected regional councils. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] It was after he had been chosen as a prospective parliamentary candidate—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are now revealing a further constitutional novelty: nothing that people say before elections should be followed after they have been elected. As a responsible adult and a prospective Conservative candidate, the right hon. and learned Gentleman wrote a pamphlet backing elected regional councils all over England. He was right then, and the Government are wrong now.

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman wants to be taken seriously, he will have to do better than dredge up 20-year-old quotations.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the people of London give thanks every day for the ending some years ago of the unlamented, overspending, bureaucratic, wasteful Greater London council and do not want anything like it again, either in London or in the rest of the country?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Crime Statistics

6. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the accuracy of official crime statistics.

Mr. Maclean: Two forms of official crime statistics are produced: crimes recorded by the police, and crimes measured by the British crime survey. Every effort is made to ensure that both sets of figures are as accurate as possible within their inherent limitations.

Mr. Williams: What does the Home Office intend to do about the problem which affects efforts to cut crime

when police officers reclassify burglaries as criminal damage, thefts as lost property and car crime as tampering?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman should not give the impression that there is somehow a deliberate attempt to classify crimes in the wrong way. That is not the case. However, if in its annual round Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary comes across anomalies, it will instruct the force to apply Home Office guidelines, which have not been changed, to try to ensure that all crime is properly classified. If someone comes across a broken window in a garden shed, it must be difficult in practice for officers to know whether that is an attempted break-in, criminal damage or vandalism. I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not giving the impression that somehow there is deliberate changing of the figures, because there is not.

Mr. Sykes: Is my hon. Friend aware that the so-called blip boy has been sent to a children's home in Scarborough? Is he further aware that North Yorkshire county council's social services department did not find it necessary to inform the police of his placement but instead said that the reason was a lack of secure accommodation? Does my hon. Friend agree that that enforces the need for new secure accommodation units as soon as possible?

Mr. Maclean: Yes. That is why we are bringing two sets on stream—the proposals for new secure accommodation which we put in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which the Opposition opposed, and more local authority secure accommodation. We need both and it is appropriate to have both.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the Minister aware of one area in which the explosion of crime has generated false statistics? In some places there has been so much burglary that people can no longer get domestic contents insurance. They therefore do not bother to report burglaries as they know that they will not be resolved anyway. In view of the Chancellor's recent Budget increase in insurance premiums, the misrepresentation of crimes will get worse in future rather than better.

Mr. Maclean: I do not accept that there is misrepresentation of crime. The trend over the past 10 years has been for people generally to report more and more crimes. In 1981 some 31 per cent. of crimes were reported, according to the British crime survey. By 1991, the figure had risen to 41 per cent.

Prisons (Satellite Television)

7. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the availability of satellite television in prisons.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Most prisons have access to satellite television, which is controlled. However, the costs are met by prisoners themselves and not by taxpayers.

Mr. Marshall: First, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment to the Privy Council? As most people do not have satellite television in their homes, will my right hon. Friend suggest to the lily-livered liberals within the prison establishment that prisoners should not enjoy in individual cells facilities that they would not enjoy in their homes?

Mr. Forsyth: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. In-cell provision of satellite television is limited to two prisons. I am sure that my hon. Friend will support the reforms that are to be introduced to ensure that privileges, of which access to television is one, are earned within the prison system. We hope to be able to announce those reforms shortly.

Mr. Tipping: Has not the availability of personal possessions in Whitemoor and Parkhurst prisons led to the situation where cells cannot be effectively searched? Is it not the Home Secretary's own policies which are causing problems in our prisons?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman ought to know, the matter of the issue and quantity of possessions in cells was one of the topics that emerged from the Woodcock report. That follows the review of privileges which has been conducted within the Prison Service. I agree that it is important that prisoners' possessions should be limited to ensure that there is effective searching and I look forward to support from Opposition Members in ensuring that that policy is enforced.

Criminal Justice

8. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Mr. Howard: We have received about 2,000 letters from hon. Members, most of them covering representations from constituents, and about 2,500 letters from members of the public.

Mr. Yeo: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Federation have warmly welcomed many provisions in the Act, including those to widen the DNA base and change the so-called rule of silence? Does he agree that politicians who opposed the measures in the House have proved that they are not only totally soft on crime but that, despite all the trendy sound bites, the modern Labour party still much prefers to protect the criminal rather than to prevent crime?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will be seen as a landmark in criminal justice legislation. It will mark a great advance, first, in helping the police to prevent crime, to bring criminals to justice and to get them convicted before the courts, and secondly, in providing the courts with the power to pass appropriate sentences.

If Labour Members believe that they have fooled a single citizen in this country by abstaining on Second Reading of the Bill but opposing the most important measures in Standing Committee and in the other place, they are grossly deluding themselves.

Mr. Cohen: When will the Home Secretary get the police to use the Act against people who demonstrate against cruelty to animals?

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I do not get the police to use the provisions of the Act against

anybody. The police decide what use they make of the powers given to them under the legislation and I have every confidence that they will use their discretion wisely.

Crime

9. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on current trends in the levels of (a) car-related crime and (b) burglary.

Mr. Howard: In the 12 months to June 1994, the number of notifiable offences of vehicle crime recorded by the police in England and Wales fell by 9 per cent. Offences of burglary fell by 8 per cent. over the same period.

Mr. Waller: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there has been a substantial improvement in the level of theft of and from vehicles as a result of the initiatives taken by motor manufacturers in fitting much better security devices? As there is clearly a better trend in the level of property-related crime throughout the country, especially in west Yorkshire, should not we congratulate the police and others responsible for that, rather than assuming that there is an inevitable rise in crime of all types?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. Both the vehicle manufacturers and, in particular, the police deserve our congratulations on the steps that they have taken to reduce car-related crime. It demonstrates that the new methods being employed by the police through more effective targeting can have significant success in tackling crime and bringing under control some of the increases of recent years.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Home Secretary agree that as those who perpetrate crimes go to our five-star, drug-ridden prisons, where they spend their time eating lobster thermidor or using their escape kits to fashion master keys for use in escape, that makes the right hon. and learned Gentleman appear to be soft on criminals? Should not he reverse his decision under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act savagely to rob the victims of crime of the compensation that they deserve? He is soft on criminals and hard on victims of crime.

Mr. Howard: I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's support for the proposals that I shall announce shortly to ensure that what have come to be regarded as entitlements in our prisons are no longer regarded as such and that privileges will have to be earned by good behaviour and can be withdrawn for misbehaviour. I look forward to his total support for those measures.

Mr. Congdon: I welcome the figures given by my right hon. and learned Friend in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), but does he agree that it is important to keep up the fight against such crime? In the light of recent events, does he further agree that it is important to ensure that prison continues to act as a deterrent? Therefore, is not it important to ensure that lax prison regimes are ruled out?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Although the reductions that I have announced are welcome—and we must congratulate the police and others concerned who have played their part in bringing them about—the figures are still far too high. We must never cease in our efforts to do all that we can to help the police to tackle crime even more effectively in future.

Mr. Michael: Does not the Secretary of State realise that people throughout the country are stunned by his complacency over burglary and car crime? Why is he ignoring the facts in the British crime survey, which shows that 6 per cent. of households were burgled in 1993, that 20 per cent. of households had their vehicles broken into during 1993, and that people's experience of crime is rising two and a half times as fast as the recorded crime figures? As the increase in the experience of crime is far higher than the increase in the recorded crime figures, what will he do about it?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my previous answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), he might have had the wit to rephrase his question. Of course I accept that crime remains far too high and that we must never cease in our efforts to give the police the tools that they need to tackle it. That is why it is so absurd for the hon. Gentleman to rise at the Dispatch Box and ask such questions when he in Standing Committee, and his party in the House of Lords, opposed tooth and nail the measures that we have put into the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which will enable the police to act effectively.

Police Pay

10. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the level of police pay in real terms (a) at present and (b) in 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The minimum salary for a new recruit to the police service in 1979 was £4,086, while the minimum now is £13,992. In real terms, police pay has increased since 1979 by 46 per cent.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does not it confirm that we are the party of law and order, which is in stark contrast to the lot opposite, who criticise the police and support rent-a-mob, rent-a-crowd and black flag on television? They oppose every piece of legislation that goes through this place. Is not it a fact that we are the party of law and order and that they are the party of no-hopers and law breakers?

Mr. Maclean: The House would not expect me to match the excellent rhetoric of my hon. Friend, so perhaps I could rely on a few statistics. If it is legitimate for the shadow Home Secretary to quote from a Tory candidate's leaflet of 1958, perhaps I can quote from 1978, the last year of a Labour Government, when Lord Callaghan—who I understand was a former police adviser—was Prime Minister. In the last year of that Labour Government, 5,000 police officers resigned in disgust at the way that they were treated by the Labour Government. The first move of the incoming Tory Government was to recruit 7,500 police officers to bring us up to establishment and to recruit another 8,000 over and above that to give us today's number of police officers.

Mr. Pike: What is Lancashire to do with the number of police and with police pay now that it has been told that the decimal point in the figure for its forthcoming

budget was in the wrong place and that the cut was not £200,000 but £2 million? What impact will that have on policing and police pay in Lancashire next year?

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary secured an excellent deal for the police service in the public expenditure survey round. At a time when there had to be, and rightly so, tight constraint on Government expenditure, we achieved a settlement for the police of 3 per cent. under the formula that is distributed around the country. If there are any errors in the calculations, each and every force can, of course, bring them to the attention of myself or the Department of the Environment during the consultation period.

Mr. Shersby: Does my hon. Friend agree that the determination of police pay using the mechanism of the Police Negotiating Board for the United Kingdom has served the country and the police very well? Can he assure the House that the Government's policy is that the PNB will continue to do its good work?

Mr. Maclean: Absolutely.

Victim Compensation

11. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on compensation to victims of violent crimes.

Mr. Howard: The Government are committed to providing generous compensation to the innocent victims of violent crime as a mark of society's sympathy for such victims. It is a measure of this country's generosity that we pay out more in compensation than the United States and far more than all other European countries put together.

Mr. Khabra: Will the Home Secretary admit that police officers, firefighters and ordinary people who are victims of the most horrendous injuries will lose out if his changes go ahead? Does he realise that some of them will have their level of compensation cut from £250,000 to a few thousand pounds, proving that the Home Secretary is not interested in the victims of crime?

Mr. Howard: I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's strictures since, under the tariff scheme that we propose, 60 per cent. of victims will receive at least as much or more money than under the old scheme.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the generous package provided in the United Kingdom is only one aspect of dealing with violent crime? When one is addressing the problems of violent crime, it is important that the forces of law see that their actions are being upheld in this place and elsewhere and that the perpetrators of violent crime are dealt with in a determined fashion.

Mr. Howard: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The best thing that we can do is to give the police the effective help that they need to bring to justice those who perpetrate violent crimes. I am determined to do all I can to achieve that end. The police take their duties in these matters extremely seriously and it is up to the House and the nation to give them their support in the sort of partnership for which I have called.

Mr. Straw: Since it is now crystal clear that Ministers were planning these wholly unjustified cuts in compensation for victims of crimes of violence well before the last election and that Ministers agreed the cuts within weeks after the 1992 election, why did the Secretary of State's party not mention a word about the cuts in its 1992 manifesto, but instead, in its 1992 campaign guide, congratulated the Government on the continuance of the old and much more generous scheme? Is not this yet another example of the way in which the British people were grievously misled by the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues at the last election?

Mr. Howard: As I have made clear, our record in these matters is absolutely outstanding. The hon. Gentleman conceded in his question that no decisions had been taken at the time of the last general election, so he destroyed by his question the very premise on which it was based.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that it has always been a fundamental principle of the benefit system in this country that only the poorest should be recompensed? Therefore, would not it seem sensible to recognise that the criminal injuries compensation scheme is wrong to compensate those on substantially higher than average earnings?

Mr. Howard: It was necessary to reform the scheme for reasons which have been explained comprehensively to the House and to do so in ways which have been approved by the House on more than one occasion.

Wheel Clamping

12. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made to bring forward proposals regarding wheel clamping.

Mr. Maclean: We are considering what action it might be appropriate to take. We will make an announcement when our proposals are ready.

Mr. Spellar: Does the Minister accept that that is a ludicrously inadequate answer? Does he recollect that the Home Office consultation on wheel clamping ended in May 1993? When will he do something about it and rid the country of the menace of the cowboy clampers?

Mr. Maclean: I also recollect that there was no clear consensus about what the future proposals should be. It is not good enough for the hon. Gentleman to accuse me of being late in bringing forward proposals when there is no agreement about what, if anything, should be done.

Mr. Alexander: Regardless of that, is not it a fact that there are far too many instances of extortion and placing people, particularly women, in fear as a result of the activities of these clampers? Surely we must take some action to give people greater reassurance should their cars be clamped by one of these cowboys.

Mr. Maclean: There is also a balance to be struck. We need to protect the legitimate interests of organisations such as hospitals and casualty departments which are sometimes affected by silly and indiscriminate parking. Of course, we must also protect the vulnerable and those who may be wrongly clamped but, as I said, I shall introduce proposals when I have come to firm conclusions on the right way ahead.

Cannabis

13. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the legalisation of cannabis.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the past year, the Home Office has received about 100 representations calling for the legalisation of cannabis.

Mr. Whittingdale: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the fight against drugs remains at the heart of the Government's crime prevention programme? Does he agree that to legalise cannabis, which the Liberal Democrats voted to support, would seriously undermine that campaign? Will he confirm that he has no intention of adopting such a policy?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. Only the Liberal party could associate itself with something as stupid as the legalisation of cannabis. To do so would send the wrong message to the country about our determination to fight drugs. That determination is clearly underlined in the Green Paper which sets out a strategy to tackle this scourge, which affects every section of every community.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Shepherd: Is the Prime Minister aware that his firm stance on the integrity of the United Kingdom is widely appreciated? Does he agree that if English Members of Parliament were unable to vote on Scottish issues, our constituents would want to know why Scottish Members of Parliament could vote on English matters which affect them?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a question that has been raised in the House on many occasions when devolution has been discussed in the past. There has never been a satisfactory answer to that question and, indeed, there is no satisfactory answer to it. If certain matters were devolved to a Parliament in any part of the kingdom and that Parliament were to have exclusive responsibility for them, then Members of Parliament from that part of the United Kingdom could not vote in this House on those issues affecting other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Blair: If devolution is such a dangerous proposal, why did the right hon. Gentleman and his party stand on such a policy in the 1974 election?

The Prime Minister: Our party does not stand on such a policy. It is dangerous and, as I have indicated, I believe that the nature of devolution, with a tax-raising Assembly, will play Scot against Scot, Scot against Briton in other parts of the United Kingdom; leave Scotland as the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom and leave Scotland losing inward investment—and Wales, too, were it to have such an Assembly; and were Scottish Members of Parliament given the right to deal with, for example, education and health in Scotland, it would not be proper for Scottish Members of Parliament to come to this House and vote on education and health in so far as England and other parts of the United Kingdom are concerned.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister says that he did not stand on such a policy. Let me read from the Conservative party manifesto of 1974. This is what the manifesto said—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Would the right hon. Gentleman paraphrase, please, and not quote directly?

Mr. Blair: That manifesto said that "devolution is our policy" and that it was the opposite of centralism. It said that it would free Scotland from the rigours of centralisation and went on to say that it was the opposite also of separatism. If it was right in 1974, surely after this passage of time it is right now.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is being very defensive—and with good reason. He should look more carefully at those proposals. He will find that there was no proposal for taxation-raising powers for that Assembly and no executive power for that Assembly. He might also be aware, in terms of this Government, that I was not even in the House then. Every single aspect of what he now proposes will lead inexorably to circumstances in which the United Kingdom itself might break up. He can have an absolute guarantee that the Government will oppose his proposals lock, stock and barrel from this day forward.

Mr. Blair: What is more, it was actually called in this manifesto a "Scottish Assembly". Is not the truth that the Prime Minister's anger is synthetic and that after 15 years of Conservative Government, 15 years of centralisation and the quango state and 15 years of anything and everything being run by unaccountable bodies stuffed with Tory placemen, it is time to bring government closer to the people it serves?

The Prime Minister: I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman, whose latest sound bite is the quango state—

Mr. Blair: It is.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that it is his latest sound bite; indeed, it is. When he uttered it first last week, in the same paragraph he proposed extra quangos. Labour's so-called "quango count" includes grant-maintained schools and self-governing hospitals. In any event, the number of non-departmental governing bodies that the right hon. Gentleman calls quangos has fallen by 35 per cent. during the passage of this Government.

The right hon. Gentleman seeks to hide the fact that he cannot answer any of the questions on devolution that we have put to him. He cannot explain why the Scots should be more highly taxed than anybody else. He cannot answer the West Lothian question. Indeed, he does not even understand what the West Lothian question is. Until he can find credible answers to that, it is no good his going back a quarter of a century and digging up, in a

mistaken way, old policies. He knows that he is wrong. He is on the defensive and he cannot win this argument for his policies are damaging to the United Kingdom.

Sir Cranley Onslow: If my right hon. Friend heard the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) rabbiting on the "Today" programme this morning about regional government for England, did it occur to him that it might be time for the House to have another look at the unfair electoral quota system which results in serious under-representation of the English electorate?

The Prime Minister: I did not have the pleasure of listening to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on the "Today" programme or, indeed, to his hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) who, I believe, was on morning television on the same subject. I did read the transcripts and I noticed that the hon. Gentlemen were unable to answer any of the questions that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has found himself unable to answer. What is undoubtedly the case is that if there were regional Parliaments with policies devolved to them, there would be bound to be an effect, unless the constitution was gerrymandered, on the number of Members of Parliament in this House from the parts of the United Kingdom that had such a Parliament with devolved tax-raising powers. That is the game that the right hon. Gentleman is playing and he is doing it because he is running scared of the Scottish Nationalists.

Q2. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kirkwood: With the Prime Minister, quite rightly, being convinced of the merits of the concept of subsidiarity in the context of the European Union and of Northern Ireland, why does he set his face against using the self-same principles for the governance of Scotland when, in the 1992 general election in Scotland, 75 per cent. of the electorate voted for parties favouring a system of greater legislative control over Scotland's own affairs?

The Prime Minister: The difference between the United Kingdom and Europe is that the United Kingdom is a single national institution—a national state. Europe and the United Kingdom—*[Interruption.]* Europe is not a national state. We are a single Government entity; we have been since 1707. I will not set us on a path where that may be broken up. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that would be in the interests of Scotland, I suggest that he examines the matter more carefully, for he will find that it is not in the interests of Scotland and not in the interests of the individual Scot.

Mr. Viggers: Has my right hon. Friend had time during his busy day to contemplate the identifiable Government expenditure on the different individuals within the constituent parts of the United Kingdom, which in England is £3,290 per head and in Scotland 20 per cent. higher at £3,968? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Labour party proposals for devolution were to be carried through, it would inevitably lead to a questioning of that subsidy, which is well understood at the moment? Therefore, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, is right when he accuses some Labour politicians of infantile incompetence, but wrong when he restricts his comments to Members of the European Parliament.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a sound and important point. We are a single United Kingdom. I wish us to remain as a single United Kingdom so that we may direct our public expenditure across a single United Kingdom to the areas that most need it. That is what we have traditionally done. That is what I wish us to continue to seek to do. What concerns me is that for party political reasons a proposal is now being put forward by the Labour party which will unsettle those traditional arrangements and set one part of the United Kingdom against another.

Q3. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Prime Minister recall that just over a year ago the Minister for Transport in London promised that the travelcard would be protected not only in name and form but in price in real terms? With people in London facing fare rises this week of up to 11 per cent. and the cost of travelcards going up by two or three times the rate of inflation, how does the Prime Minister justify that promise being broken?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should have a look at the policies on transport right across London, including the travelcard. He will find that the Government have a better record for keeping their promises on transport and other matters than any previous Government. I suggest that he looks right across the range at those promises that have been kept and the improvement in transport facilities that are available. What will damage transport facilities is—

Mr. Tony Banks: Privatisation.

The Prime Minister: Not privatisation, as the hon. Gentleman says. That has been the cry on every single privatisation that we have had and every single privatisation has improved the service.

Mr. Booth: Is the Prime Minister aware that for every £1 spent on private schools coming through charitable status, £1.30 is given out through bursaries and scholarships by those schools? So, the Labour party's exercise is a vindictive, cynical manoeuvre.

The Prime Minister: Well, I do not have the slightest difficulty in agreeing with my hon. Friend about that. Labour Members talk about choice and diversity. They

talk about the crusade for education. Their crusade seems to be to take away choice from as many people as they possibly can.

Q4. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Prime Minister have another go at trying to justify his ridiculous claim that the idea of a Scottish Parliament is a form of dangerous teenage madness? Bearing in mind that the idea of a Scottish Parliament has been supported, even by prominent Tories, such as former Prime Ministers Douglas-Home and Heath, and by the current Secretaries of State for Defence and for Scotland, what is the Prime Minister going to do about those dangerous teenage madmen?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman needs to engage in some grown-up politics. He may, for example, ask his hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) whether he would agree with his remarks. The answer to his question is the one that I gave a few moments ago. There was not a proposition for a tax-raising Parliament with Executive powers, dividing responsibilities and tax-raising authority between different parts of the United Kingdom.

The Labour party's proposition will put Scotland significantly backwards in its economic prosperity; will lose inward investment to Scotland; will increase taxation in Scotland; and will set Scots against other parts of the United Kingdom and some Scots against other Scots. That is not a wise proposition. It is, as I have said, very unwise.

Dame Jill Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Birmingham council women's unit has been wasting £300,000 per annum of ratepayers' money and that the head of that department has been suspended for many months on full pay of £44,000 per annum while she wasted a further £250,000 on an ill-judged housing scheme? As she has now been offered £11,000 to leave the council and to go away and keep quiet, does my right hon. Friend feel that that is a matter for the Audit Commission to consider in the light of its recent report?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of that particular matter. As the Opposition so often talk about waste in local government and elsewhere, they might conceivably have raised it. I saw the Audit Commission report which made the point that too often local government services are provided by a dramatically over-staffed service indeed. It seems to me that too often local government cuts services instead of staff and then takes the easy option of blaming the Government for underfunding it when it has cut those services. The Audit Commission report makes that clear and I am delighted that it does so.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week, and any further information that he can give us about future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam Speaker, the business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 16 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill.

TUESDAY 17 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 JANUARY—Opposition day (1st allotted day). Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on through-ticketing under rail privatisation followed by a debate on access by Spanish and Portuguese fishing vessels to British waters on Opposition motions.

THURSDAY 19 JANUARY—Motion on the Legal Aid Advisory Committee (Dissolution) Order.

Motion on the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) (No 2) scheme and motion relating to the Farm and Conservation Grant (Amendment) Regulations.

FRIDAY 20 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

It may also be helpful to the House if I indicate—emphasising that it can be only on a provisional basis and could be subject to change—that the business currently planned for the following week is consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill on Monday 23 January and Wednesday 25 January, with Second Reading of the Disability Discrimination Bill, which is being published today, on Tuesday 24 January. I am not yet in a position, even provisionally, to indicate the business for Thursday 26 January.

I can also tell the House that, following its approval of the motions that I proposed on 19 December, I will be tabling later today a motion providing that the House will not sit on the following Fridays: 10 March, 12 May, 19 May, 26 May, 16 June, 23 June, 7 July and 21 July. As an additional bonus, I can also say that I do not at present expect the House to sit on any Friday in August.

In the shorter term, it will also be for the convenience of the House to learn that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the Easter recess will be from 7 April until 18 April and since 26 May is to be a non-sitting Friday, the House will rise for the Whitsun recess on 25 May and return on 6 June.

I understand that you, Madam Speaker, will be making a statement after business questions about the detailed arrangements for Wednesday morning sittings. The first such sitting will take place on 25 January.

Lastly, the House, particularly those who may serve on the Finance Bill Standing Committee, may like to know that, following discussion and agreement through the usual channels, it will be proposed that the Standing Committee, which has always hitherto sat in the afternoon and evening, and indeed often well into the night, should sit in the morning and afternoon. The spirit of Jopling appears to be spreading.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that important statement. As he says, the spirit of Jopling will benefit all hon. Members in due course. In particular, I thank him for his information about non-sitting Fridays and the recess dates. I understand why the business for the week after next could be given only a provisional basis, but I am sure that it will benefit the House if the Leader of the House continues to give us notice of that kind. Opposition Members accept that that can be done only on such a provisional basis.

As the House has now decided to experiment with and modernise our procedures—we have heard of the benefits of that this afternoon—will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the accountability of Government to Parliament, especially in view of the vast expansion of enabling legislation in recent years?

Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange a debate on one important aspect of the loss of accountability—how the Government can sell off Railtrack, which is worth up to £6 billion of public assets, and which is expected by the public as well as experts to be an unmitigated disaster, without initiating a full debate on that issue in this House? The Leader of the House will be aware that the Opposition have facilitated a debate on Wednesday on one aspect of rail privatisation that is causing great concern—through ticketing. If selling off Railtrack is such a good idea, will the Leader of House guarantee, in Government time, a debate on that issue?

Mr. Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for her generous remarks about the additional bits of my statement. I note what she said, and I am grateful for her recognition of the necessary provisionality. I shall not always be able to be as forthcoming as I have been today, but the very fact that I have been forthcoming today is an earnest of good intentions and my continued willingness to use best endeavours to help the House.

As for the rest of the hon. Lady's questions, at present I certainly have no plans for a debate along the lines that she has suggested. Indeed, I was not entirely sure of the boundaries of the proposed accountability debate. I remind the hon. Lady that Ministers, as the Home Secretary has repeatedly made clear in recent weeks, remain accountable to Parliament for the performance of the agencies which are within the responsibility of their Departments.

As for Railtrack, the reason that there will not be a debate of the kind that the hon. Lady suggested is that Parliament passed legislation which did not require such a debate.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on the economic aspects of constitutional change and examine ownership of industry within the United Kingdom, particularly as we can now, apparently, write to Inverkeithing, the address of the shadow Chancellor, for advice on that ownership?

Mr. Newton: I will certainly consider the scope for such a debate, but some fairly extensive exchanges about it—I acknowledge, not amounting to a debate—have taken place in the past few minutes. I am sure that there will be further opportunities to advert to those matters.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): May I add my warm welcome to the progress that the Leader of the House has made in implementing the Jopling proposals? It is a credit to him. The House will find that benefits will flow. Since, following the question of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), and

if Prime Minister's Question Time today is anything to go by, constitutional reform in relation to devolution is now very much on the public agenda, put there by no less a person than his own Prime Minister, will the Leader of the House recognise that by staging a debate in Government time?

Mr. Newton: Obviously I would always consider such points. Indeed, in the light of the increasing evidence, in exchanges in the House and on radio and television and elsewhere, of the inability of those on the Opposition Front Bench to answer any of the questions that arise from the proposals that they are allegedly floating, there could be merit in such a debate.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Did my right hon. Friend note the significant statement on legal aid made yesterday by the Lord Chancellor, and if so, did he note the promise that a Green Paper is to be issued on the subject? Will my right hon. Friend use his best endeavours to ensure that that happens as soon as possible, accompanied by a statement in the House by a Minister, so that we can raise the question of the continuing injustice to civil litigants who win against legally aided clients yet do not receive their full costs?

Mr. Newton: I know that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is anxious to publish his Green Paper as soon as possible, and I shall communicate to him my hon. Friend's request that he should do so. The question of a statement can more appropriately be considered nearer the time.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Why will we discuss the Government's wholly inadequate Bill on discrimination against disabled people on 24 January, although the White Paper was published only this morning and the Bill itself will be published later, when a private Member's Bill—the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which has in the past had almost unanimous support in the House—is not to be discussed until 10 February? That Bill has tremendous support in both Houses of Parliament. Should we not have an opportunity to discuss the major piece of legislation first, rather than the inadequate Government shadow?

Mr. Newton: I propose that the House should debate the Disability Discrimination Bill on 24 January because it is now ready—it is being published today—and it represents the Government's view of the best way to make sensible, practical and realistic progress towards an aim that we all share. We want to get on with that as soon as possible. As for the White Paper and a statement, some weeks ago my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People made a substantial statement covering all those matters, which will be fully fleshed out in the White Paper.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): In connection with the debate later today on child care facilities in the House, in which many of us will be unable to participate because of previous engagements, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that many Members on both sides of the House believe that, in the best interests of the child, the most appropriate nursery is one near that child's home and not in the House of Commons, where facilities would not be suitable—

Madam Speaker: Order. Those are matters for debate later. The House has been anxiously awaiting the debate for some time, and we are grateful to the Leader of the House for arranging it today, but I cannot allow Members to debate it at this stage, during business questions.

Mr. Newton: May I simply say, in the spirit in which I am sure my hon. Friend intended her question to be taken, that I shall be here to listen to the debate, and I note that, unfortunately, she cannot attend. I was aware that she was not very keen on the proposals, and I shall certainly take note of the way in which she phrased her question.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Why are we not being allowed to see the Government's Bill on discrimination against disabled people until 4.30 pm today, when its contents are already being widely discussed outside this House? By 4.30, as the right hon. Gentleman must know, most Members will have left for their constituencies until next Monday. Why could we not have had the Bill at 3.30 pm, and was the right hon. Gentleman consulted about the timing of its arrival in the Vote Office?

Mr. Newton: I am sorry, I think that I misheard one word in what the right hon. Gentleman said—I thought that he said "insulting".

Mr. Morris: No—"consulting".

Mr. Newton: At any rate, so far as I am aware, the arrangements for publishing the Bill are entirely consistent with the normal arrangements for publishing such Bills. Frankly, I do not think it unreasonable to expect Members of Parliament to be here at 4.30 on a Thursday afternoon to attend to matters in which they are interested.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): May we have a debate next week on the tragic situation in Sweden, whose currency collapsed yesterday and whose Government have today been forced to slash welfare spending, to force up taxation dramatically and to increase interest rates by 7 per cent.? Would it not be helpful for the House to find out why things are so different in nearby Norway, where the currency is strong and the economic indicators are better than ever?

Mr. Newton: In the same spirit with which I approached yesterday's debate, I shall respond to my hon. Essex Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) by saying that I take note of his question.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): In view of the Government's repeated commitments from 1989 onwards to the total modernisation of the Kent coastal railway services; and given the decision by the British Railways Board on Monday not to go ahead with any further modernisation after the first tranche of 64 out of 600 trains that had been promised, will the Leader of the House guarantee that the House will have an opportunity to discuss the consequences, both for Kent commuters and for the 750 people who work at the Asea Brown Boveri carriage works in my constituency and who will be out of a job, leaving the country unable to buy these trains in future unless it does so from abroad?

Mr. Newton: The fact is that British Rail has concluded that there was not a commercial case for new trains for the Kent coast before March 1999. Quite apart from the hon. Gentleman's views, I am well aware that

[Mr. Newton]

many of my hon. Friends from Kent do not agree with BR's judgment. The fact is, however, that procurement decisions are for BR. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads is, or was—I am not sure which—this afternoon meeting the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I am sure that they will have an opportunity to express their views at that meeting.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Can my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on the serious problem of overcrowding in offices in Scotland—particularly at 25 Church street, Inverkeithing? Is it not intolerable that the people who are seeking to force the leader of the Labour party to ditch his plans to reform clause IV should have to share offices with the shadow Chancellor? Cannot something be done about it?

Mr. Newton: I am happy to say that I have no responsibility for the allocation of space in Labour party offices in Scotland. I can say only that it was at the very least an interesting missive which was sent from that office to *The Guardian*.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 351?

[*That this House congratulates all those who have been peacefully protesting about the export of livestock for slaughter from Shoreham; believes that the Government has failed lamentably to end this disgusting trade, or to secure acceptable journey times; condemns the Minister of Agriculture for allowing calves from his own farm to end up in veal crates and believes him to be entirely discredited in respect of farm animal welfare; demands that the Government bans the export of calves destined for veal crates and the import of veal produce in crates; and, if necessary, defends such action in the European Court under the terms of Article 36 of the Treaty of Rome.*]

It concerns the exporting of live calves. Is it not nonsense that veal crates should be banned in this country, yet veal calves are exported and the veal is reimported? If we can achieve an opt-out on something like the social chapter, which large numbers of people in this country wanted, why cannot we get an opt-out on the export of veal calves?

Mr. Newton: I always well understand why the hon. Gentleman asks his questions about animal welfare, but he is asking for an opt-out from existing law, not from prospective law, which is what we were talking about with the social chapter. I believe that the Government have often been advised that we have no legal power to ban the export of animals, as the hon. Gentleman requests, or to ban the imports of veal, as he requests. We shall work very hard in Europe for the protection and standards that we exercise in this country and which have led to veal crates being banned here.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Notwithstanding what my right hon. Friend said in answer to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), can he not understand that Members on both sides of the House are deeply anxious about the future of the ABB carriage works in York and about the carriage works in Derby? Should not someone be answerable to this House for decisions taken by a public industry?

British Rail has published no figures on which its decision was based; it did not even have the courtesy or the good grace to put the figures to Transport Ministers or to the Treasury, to check whether there was a business case, under the private finance initiative, for financing these much needed trains for the south-east railway. Should we not have a statement in the House next week, so that we can put these questions to Ministers on behalf of our constituents?

Mr. Newton: I know that my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot add to what I said to the hon. Member for York. I know too that my hon. Friend will have the opportunity, if he has not already had it, to make his points direct to the Minister.

I cannot this afternoon promise a debate in Government time, but perhaps, when you, Madam Speaker, announce the arrangements for Wednesday morning debates, my hon. Friend may wish to consider seeking an opportunity on one of those occasions.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Can the Leader of the House assure us that the Disability Discrimination Bill, which is to be presented today, will include Northern Ireland, bearing in mind that I raised that question at the time of the Minister's statement; or will we be left to continue to support the private Member's Bill that will give further rights to disabled people in the whole of the nation?

Mr. Newton: I am certainly aware of the hon. Gentleman's point. He will be aware from earlier exchanges that the Bill will be published shortly, and that will give him the answer to his question.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): Will my right hon. Friend find time in the near future for a debate on the Liberal-proposed MPs charter, so that we can benefit from the advice of the leader of the Liberal Democrats on an acceptable level of attendance in the voting Lobby?

Mr. Newton: That is a very tempting suggestion.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can we have a statement on the arrangements for Ministers meeting people from outside the House of Commons? If the Leader of the House were to meet Mr. Ian Greer and discuss a matter of public policy, and I were to table a question asking the Leader of the House whether he had met Mr. Greer, would he answer me on the basis that it had been a formal meeting, or would he refuse to answer in so far as it may have been an informal meeting? What is the distinction between formal and informal meetings where they take place between Ministers and lobbying companies?

Mr. Newton: I really do not think that I should try to answer a question like that on a hypothetical basis without knowing what the subject is, the meeting or anything else. The last occasion on which I recall meeting Mr. Ian Greer—although I imagine that the hon. Gentleman's question is not particularly directed at me—was passing him in a corridor at the Conservative party conference, when we exchanged some brief words. *[Interruption.]* No,

we certainly did not. As far as I am concerned, the answer that I would give to such a question would depend on all the circumstances involved.

Mr. Tony Banks: It was a brown envelope job.

Mr. Newton: It was not.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on drug use in council housing? Does he realise that many local authorities continue to provide council housing for known drug dealers? Is he aware that the residents of the Queen's Park estate in my constituency are fed up with drug pushers in council flats who continue to sell LSD and crack cocaine to children as young as 11? Is it not time that Blackpool's Labour-controlled council was forced to stop sheltering criminals?

Mr. Newton: I would certainly hope that anybody concerned with the sort of problem that my hon. Friend described would look carefully at how they could deal with it, reduce it and, I hope, prevent it. As chairman of the group that produced the White Paper "Tackling Drugs Together", I hope that they would find the Government's proposals for strategy in that area helpful in achieving that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a question of which I gave notice to the right hon. Gentleman's office and to the Foreign Secretary's private secretary? In the light of the report of Claude Cheysson, which was broadcast at five minutes to eight this morning outlining the starvation situation in Iraq, and in which he gave his expert opinion as a former French Foreign Minister and European Commissioner—that, far from sapping the strength of Saddam Hussein, sanctions had rallied the Iraqi people to Saddam Hussein as nothing else—and in view of the report of Riad El Taher outlining the medical situation in Iraq, which is in the possession of the Foreign Office, could we have a debate on what amounts to the manipulation of the United Nations by the United States and Britain, and on the continuation of these counter-productive, indeed wicked, sanctions?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows not only that I have considerable respect for the integrity of his position, even when I do not agree with it, but that we have great sympathy with the Iraqi people, and therefore recognise his concern for them. But the fact is that it is Saddam Hussein, not the United Nations, who is responsible for their suffering. We deplore the Iraqi regime for its failure to implement United Nations Security Council resolutions 706 and 712, which would allow Iraq to sell up to £1.6 billion of oil in return for humanitarian supplies. Since April 1991, Britain has contributed more than £66 million of aid to Iraq.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Will my right hon. Friend consider holding an urgent debate on the implications for the workings of the House arising from the failure, according to the *Official Report*, of three Scottish Members of the shadow Cabinet—the hon. Members for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar)—to vote for the Opposition's amendment to the Government's motion on the Committee of Selection, despite the fact that they were available 15 minutes later to vote against the Government's motion? When the Leader of the Opposition tables an amendment on behalf of the shadow Cabinet and three senior members of it fail to turn up to vote for it, surely that raises questions about how the House operates.

Mr. Newton: I can only suppose that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was perhaps somewhere writing another advertisement for *The Guardian*.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I listened carefully to the Leader of the House when he announced that Parliament would not be sitting for eight Fridays, and that we will have 11 days off for Easter and another 12 days off for Whitsuntide. Would it not be easier for him to come to the House and tell us which days we will be sitting?

Will the right hon. Gentleman understand that there should be a statement for those people outside this place who would like to have a four-day week? If we introduced a four-day week for the real wealth creators, the workers who provide goods and services, we could probably mop up those 4 million people who are unemployed. It is the unemployed we should be concerned about, not having days off in here.

Mr. Newton: I shall not go over all the ground again, but I do just wish, as I suspect virtually everybody else in the House does, that the hon. Gentleman would at least recognise that the suggestion that this is a four-day week is utterly ludicrous. What Members of Parliament wish to be doing is working in their constituencies in conjunction with their duties in the House.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend invite the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make an early statement next week on the anomalies and uncertainties in the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994 which were so glaringly exposed last night, not least by the inability of the Paymaster General to tell me whether children travelling on the Ruislip lido railway would be subject to VAT at the standard rate, a rate which, under European Union rules, cannot be reduced below 15 per cent.?

In that statement, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the Chancellor promises the House that never again will Her Majesty's Government move an increase of VAT from zero rate to standard rate without primary legislation?

Mr. Newton: I was not myself able to be present except briefly during the debate last night but, as my hon. Friend has said, the matter was extensively debated then. I shall not seek this afternoon to add to what was said then, but I shall certainly bring my hon. Friend's point to the attention of the Paymaster General and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that many people in London are thoroughly fed up with a health service that cannot deliver, a transport service that is expensive and serious housing shortages? The one place that could be a centre for regional government in London, county hall, is a centre of a huge controversy and inquiry about sleaze and corruption. Is it not time to have a debate about the nature

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

of local government in London and the need for the capital city to have an elected authority like every other capital city in the world?

Mr. Newton: We do from time to time have debates on London, although I have no immediate plans to arrange one, but I shall bear the request in mind. However, in saying that, I should make it clear that I do not for one minute accept the hon. Gentleman's description of circumstances in London, whether on health, transport or anything else.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on early-day motion 43?

[*That this House urges Her Majesty's Government to end the chaos and uncertainty currently surrounding the export of live animals by introducing regulations to require animals exported for food to be slaughtered in this country prior to their export.*]

It has been signed by 75 Members from both sides of the House, and covers a matter of great concern throughout the country. It calls for animals to be slaughtered here before being exported as meat. May we have a debate on that important matter during the next week?

Mr. Newton: It is fairly clear that I do not plan to arrange a debate on that subject next week. My hon. Friend, however, may be among those who will bear in mind what you will say in a few minutes about Wednesdays, Madam Speaker.

I have already referred to the issue that my hon. Friend raised in responding to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), and I think that my answer now must be much the same.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): At the risk of boring the Leader of the House, may I ask him again to ask the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House—if not next week, at some time in the near future—to share the information that he has about the recent investigation into the loss of the Derbyshire? Does the Leader of the House agree that the bereaved families who have been waiting some 12 to 14 years for a response are entitled to that information, and that the Secretary of State alone should not be privy to it?

Mr. Newton: I believe that the hon. Gentleman asked me about that in December, when I last answered Prime Minister's questions. I cannot add to the reply that I gave him then, but I shall bring his continued concern to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I seek some clarification of remarks made earlier by the Leader of the House. Was he making a clear, unequivocal commitment to provide Government time for a debate on constitutional change in the United Kingdom, given the current interest in the subject? If so, will those on both Front Benches please provide us with definitions of their terminology as applied to the words "nation", "region", "state", "sovereignty", "independence" and "co-operation"—and, of course, the principle on which they base referendums?

Mr. Newton: As I have said, I should certainly like to hear definitions of some of the Labour party's proposals.

I am afraid that the answer to the first part of the hon. Lady's question is no. I was simply being as friendly and helpful as I could—as I always am—without commitment.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): First, may I press the Leader of the House further on the issue of Government time for a debate on animal welfare? Secondly, will he give an assurance that Ministers responsible for the several private Members' Bills relating to that subject will adopt a rather more positive and constructive approach than some Ministers have adopted in the past in regard to private Members' Bills?

Lastly, will the right hon. Gentleman consider using his good offices to persuade the Government to advise those responsible for Government purchasing policies—and, indeed, the House authorities—to announce that they are unwilling to purchase imported veal until the means of its production is acceptable? Those are three positive steps that the Government could and should take to assist in the matter.

Mr. Newton: Obviously, my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider the various private Members' Bills as constructively as they can when the details are available. I am not sure whether all of them have been published yet, but I am sure that they will be read very carefully. As for the hon. Gentleman's last question, if—as I take it—he is suggesting that the House catering authorities, for example, should cease to buy white veal, I am sure that the Chairman of the Catering Committee will consider his suggestion.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House about the death of Lee Bowen in Doncaster prison? Given that some 86 per cent. of those working in the prison had never been in prison before when it opened in June, I am sure that the Home Secretary will accept responsibility for this event, which was a direct result of his privatisation policy.

Mr. Newton: In view of the subject of the hon. Gentleman's question, I think that it would be appropriate for me to bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Are we likely to have a chance to debate the work of the Overseas Development Administration? If not, will the right hon. Gentleman please ask for a statement about overseas debts owed to this country in general and, in particular, the debt owed by the kingdom of Jordan?

In view of the Jordanian Government's skilful, courageous and successful involvement in the middle east process, and given that they are in any event very unlikely to be able to repay the debt, perhaps this is the right time to write it off as a gesture of good will and good intent towards a very brave Government.

Mr. Newton: As the hon. and learned Gentleman probably expects, I cannot promise a debate on that matter. However, he has effectively made his suggestion, and I am sure that it will be looked at by my right hon. Friends who are responsible for such matters.

Wednesday Morning Sittings

4.4 pm

Madam Speaker: Under the new arrangements for Wednesdays there will be one or two general debates between 10 am and 1 pm and up to three short debates between 1 pm and 2.30 pm. Ballots for the subjects to be debated will be held under broadly the same arrangements as those which have hitherto applied for post-Consolidated Fund debates and last-day Adjournment debates. The first Wednesday morning sitting will be on 25 January, and applications should reach my office no later than 10 pm on Tuesday 17 January. A list showing the subjects and times will be published the following day.

Members may apply for both the general debates and the short debates, and each application should indicate clearly into which ballot they wish to be entered. Separate ballots will be held for each type of debate but, of course, in the same week no Member will be successful in both ballots. Similar arrangements and a similar timetable will apply in each subsequent week. The existing arrangements with respect to Adjournment debates at the end of each day's business will remain unchanged.

BILL PRESENTED

DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Secretary Portillo, Mr. William Hague, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Mawhinney, Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, Mr. David Hunt, Mrs. Secretary Shephard and Mr. Secretary Lang presented a Bill to make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled persons in connection with employment and the provision of goods, facilities and services; to make provision about the employment of disabled persons; and to establish a National Disability Council: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 32.]

Orders of the Day

Town and Country Planning (Costs of Inquiries Etc.) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is rather technical and in terms of its geographic spread it could probably be described as a wee Bill, but it has a clause 4!

The Bill is extremely important because it proposes to remove a current source of uncertainty about who should pay for the services of a planning inspector appointed to hold an inquiry on a planning authority's behalf into objections to a development plan or other similar plan. It also applies to Scotland and Wales.

The history of the matter is worth a glance. Since the 1970s, when the first local plan inquiry was held under the then Town and Country Planning Act 1971, the Department and local planning authorities assumed that it was lawful on the basis of an implied contract to impose a charge for making the services of the inspector available. That seemed entirely natural as the planning authority was statutorily required to hold a development plan inquiry and should therefore expect to pay for the expense involved in the process, including the expenses of an inspector whom the Secretary of State appoints independently of the authority.

Some 21 years later, in 1992 and in the following year, Birmingham city council queried the amount charged by the Planning Inspectorate for the inspector appointed to hold the council's unitary development plan inquiry. Subsequently, the council questioned whether any statutory power existed to levy those charges. In support of the argument, the council cited the judgment of the House of Lords in the case of McCarthy and Stone (Developments) Ltd. *v.* Richmond upon Thames London borough council.

That judgment held that there is no power for a public body to levy a charge for its services in the absence of an express or implied statutory provision. Moreover, I am advised that although the Planning Inspectorate and the local planning authority normally agree on the terms on which an inspector is to be appointed for a development plan inquiry, there is no implied power to charge the authority for this service on any contractual basis.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other colleagues were made aware of that legislative gap, the Government decided that the only reasonable course was to fill it as soon as parliamentary time became available.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I agree that the only reasonable course is to fill the gap, but surely it is unreasonable and wrong to apply backdating. I hope that the Minister will explain why the Bill has to be retrospective given that the supremely qualified staff of

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

Birmingham city council, which has constantly been maligned by the Government, brought this matter to the attention of the House and the Government.

Sir Paul Beresford: I thank the hon. Member for that early and anticipated shot. I shall fire a reply in a moment or two. *[Interruption.]* I shall answer in a moment or two if the hon. Gentleman will just bide his time.

My hon. Friend the then Minister for Local Government and Planning announced in a written answer on 17 February 1994 the Government's intention to legislate on the issue in order to put the matter beyond doubt. *[Interruption.]* For the benefit of those hon. Members who are squawking, it is worth pointing out that the origin of the problem was in the drafting of the Town and Country Planning Act 1968. If there was sloppy drafting then, it was the fault of the Government of the day in 1968.

Following that announcement, we did not consult in detail with local authorities associations about the provisions to be included in the Bill, but no discourtesy was intended. There are three reasons to explain that. First, as my hon. Friend's written answer explained, the Bill simply restores the situation to what it was previously thought to be by all concerned in these matters. Secondly, the Bill will have no effect on public service manpower, as the explanatory and financial memorandum points out.

Thirdly, the agency's chief planning inspector informed all local planning authorities last year that the inspectorate would collect no further charges for development plan inquiries until the proposed legislation had been enacted. In the meantime, any local planning authority wishing to claim a repayment of its charge will receive it, but authorities have been advised to make full budgetary provision for the amounts that would be due to the Department if the proposed legislation were eventually enacted. This is, in effect, consultation in any event. Having changed sides from local government to central Government, I can fairly say that I have never known local authorities to be slow in responding when finances, either positive or negative, were concerned. We have not been flooded with complaints.

The sums at stake may not seem large in total local government public expenditure terms, but the underlying principle is important. In England and Wales, up to and including 1992-93, they amount to £4.5 million. For 1993-94, £1.4 million has been recovered from planning authorities and paid into a suspense account. A further £2.6 million is owing to my right hon. Friend's Department. In the current year—1994-95—approximately £3 million will be due to the Department. In future years, charges will amount to approximately £3.6 million, on average, while the present development plan work load continues.

The Department has repaid some £2.8 million to 97 local authorities, along with interest payments of approximately £101,000. The principle on which this Bill is based is that authorities should pay for the services that these charges represent and for which provision is currently made in the annual local government financial settlement.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Is my hon. Friend saying that it is not just Birmingham that has not paid, but that a whole raft of local authorities have not paid and are deliberately avoiding paying, or is it simply that they have not been asked to do so?

Sir Paul Beresford: It is not quite as simple as that. Local government, trying to be at its best in managing its finances, has perceived an opportunity. About 97 local authorities have had money repaid, along with interest payments. If the Bill is not passed, that backpayment will not arise again—it will return to Government.

Clause 1, which applies to England and Wales, is the core provision of the Bill. It does two things. First, it enables the Department to recover from planning authorities the costs that we bear, through the Planning Inspectorate, in appointing an inspector to hold what is called a qualifying inquiry. That is an inquiry set up to hear objections to local plans, unitary development plans or simplified planning zone schemes, to consider objections to such schemes or to conduct an examination in public into structure plan proposals.

Secondly, the clause enables my right hon. Friend to provide, by regulations, the standard daily amount and the travel and subsistence allowances that planning authorities are to pay to persons, other than inspectors, who are appointed to conduct an examination in public into structure plans. I regret that the provisions of clause 1 will inevitably seem lengthy and detailed. It is felt that that is necessary to ensure that the provisions do the job properly this time and, so far as humanly possible, do not leave anything to chance.

Clause 2, which also applies in England and Wales, deals with retrospection. If the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) pauses in his conversation, he will hear that the Government are persuaded that, exceptionally, retrospection is justified on this occasion for two main reasons. The first is that clause 2 imposes no new financial burden on local planning authorities. It simply validates past payments that authorities made in good faith, believing—as did the Department—that they were sought and paid lawfully. In that context, it is important to remember that provision was made in the annual local authority financial settlement for the estimated sums that planning authorities expected to incur by way of charges for inspectors' services at development plan inquiries.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Minister said that arrangements had been made to allocate resources to local authorities for those purposes. Birmingham council's original estimate for an inquiry, based on information given to it, was about £30,000 yet the final bill was almost twice as much. The council is not aware that its grant from central Government has been increased to take that into account.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am aware that a discussion has taken place, but I find that a little interesting. I decided to check and query the matter and to consider the costs.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): They were £68,000.

Sir Paul Beresford: No, they were £63,508. The invoice is dated 3 November 1992. The inquiry lasted 35 inquiry days, five inspection site days and 112 working days for the inspector. I shall not go through the details. It is interesting that a similar inquiry involving a well-known authority that is dear to many of our hearts, Wandsworth, lasted 23 days with four site visits—making a total of 27 days. It had a similar number of objections—

51,455. On a day-by-day basis, which is not a fair way of doing it, Wandsworth has more reason to complain than Birmingham.

The second main reason why retrospection is justified is that, without retrospection, the other provisions in the Bill would be unfair to planning authorities that, through no fault of their own, have not yet reached the stage of holding an inquiry as part of their development plan process. There is no good reason why planning authorities that have already passed that stage should receive a windfall financial benefit through not including retrospective provisions in the Bill.

By arrangement with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who will reply to the debate, and for the convenience of the House, I shall say a few words about the Scottish provisions in the Bill. I understand that the position has not been tested in the Scottish courts. In addition, planning authorities in Scotland have not, so far, pressed for repayment of the sums paid in the past. I suspect that that is an example of canny Scots. Nevertheless, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland thinks that similar problems may arise, he considers it prudent to legislate now to remove any doubt about the basis of charges made.

Clause 3 enables my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to set charges by regulations. It establishes a firm statutory basis for payment by planning authorities in Scotland. That will apply in the case of both local plan and simplified planning zone inquiries. Although that provides equivalent powers to clause 1, there are a number of distinctive Scottish features. First, reporters for local plan or simplified planning zone inquiries in Scotland are appointed not by the Secretary of State, as in England and Wales, but by the planning authority from a list provided by the Secretary of State. That list may include both full-time reporters and other suitably experienced people who are not officers of the Secretary of State.

Secondly, examinations in public into structure plan proposals in Scotland are carried out on behalf of the Secretary of State, so the cost does not fall on the planning authority, as it does in England and Wales. Finally, the Scottish Office inquiry reporters unit remains part of the Secretary of State's Department and is not a next steps agency. Clause 3 reflects those distinctive elements but with the same underlying objective and effect as clause 1 for England and Wales.

Clause 4 makes retrospective provision with regard to local plan inquiries, held under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Acts 1969 and 1972. There have been no simplified planning zone inquiries in Scotland yet.

As in England and Wales, neither of those clauses implies any new burden on Scottish planning authorities. They are intended to put on a firmer statutory footing the charging arrangements that have operated for a number of years.

Mr. Steen: Can my hon. Friend assure me that the amounts that authorities have already paid in relation to their local planning inquiries will not be increased retrospectively?

Sir Paul Beresford: That is absolutely correct. It is a bill that is related to set fees for time and services rendered.

Mr. Rooker: Is it interest free?

Sir Paul Beresford: I will have to check on that.

Mr. Rooker: The Government have repaid some of the money to local authorities and, as I understand it, they have repaid some of the interest payments as well. Some of the payments must go back 20 years. The Government will now collect that money from local authorities. Will they insist on the return of the interest payments? It is bad enough for them to insist on the interest on the principal sum, but insisting on the interest on the interest would be unfair.

Would not it be a good idea for the Government—I am sure that the Minister will have thought about this—if every time a Department levied a bill on any citizen or local authority, it had to print on that bill the statutory provision that allowed it to make that charge? It should have to give the legal authority that allows it to make that charge on everything, no matter what. With such a provision, this case would not have arisen. In addition, it would highlight any other cases lurking in Whitehall where the Government are illegally charging individuals or authorities.

Sir Paul Beresford: This does not go back 20 years. It goes back to the discussions with Birmingham which were referred to by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones). We are talking not so much about a refusal to pay as the fact that the bills have not been collected. If the Bill becomes law, all the amounts due then will be recovered from the authorities owing sums for inquiries.

Mr. Rooker: Without interest?

Sir Paul Beresford: I believe so, but I will let the hon. Gentleman know.

This is a technical and comparatively short Bill that provides formal charging powers that everyone had assumed existed for some 20 years. We are remedying uncertainty. Today we are concerned with the principle of the Bill and the Government are sure that it is soundly based on the principle that it is reasonable for the user of a public service to pay for it, including, as we have just discussed, an essential provision for retrospective payment. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.22 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): What a shambles. The Minister has told us that he is announcing a new measure that will provide certainty. In fact, what he has said has created even more uncertainty. He does not know how many years it will go back. In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) he said that it will go back to the discussions with Birmingham. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) he said that he does not know whether interest is payable and, if it is, he does not know whether it will be payable from

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

the time the money went back or whether it will be interest free. I hope that by the time his colleague the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland replies to the debate he will have studied the Bill more carefully than the Minister so that he can provide firm answers to the questions that we intend to ask.

There is an old proverb about making haste and acting slowly. There is another equally well-known proverb about people paying for their mistakes. This extraordinary Bill is a combination of both. As the House knows, planning legislation is one of the most complex areas of law. Changes in planning law require the most careful consideration, the most diligent consultation with those most affected by the changes and the best possible briefing for Ministers. With this measure, the Government have unfortunately failed in all those areas. There may be two reasons for that. First, perhaps they made a mistake. Secondly, having made a mistake, perhaps they do not want to admit it. This is not the first time that the Government have made a mistake and do not want to admit it.

The House waited in vain to hear the Minister take some responsibility for this legislative mess, but we did not once hear him say, "Sorry, we have made a mistake." There was no contrition and no apology. The Secretary of State could not find time to come to the Dispatch Box and take responsibility himself.

Sir Paul Beresford: As the Bill refers back to the Labour Government's 1968 drafting, I should have thought that the apology ought to come from the hon. Gentleman's party. In addition, I have now had it clarified that where interest has been repaid that interest alone will be recovered by the inspectorate agency. I hope that that clarifies the issue for the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Vaz: We now hear from the Minister that it was all Harold Wilson's fault and that it is nothing to do with this Government. The Secretary of State could not come to the Dispatch Box to take responsibility for what had happened because he is the good news man who gets to go to press conferences and to launch new initiatives. The Under-Secretary of State is the bad news man who gets to come to the Dispatch Box when the Government get things wrong. It is ironic that that task should fall to a Minister who, of all the Ministers in the Department of the Environment, knows what it is like to be a local councillor and to carry the heavy burdens of a council leader—although he had privatised most of the council's functions by the time he left Wandsworth.

The Minister knows that every spending decision taken by a local authority has to be set against carefully defined criteria. Local government has suffered immeasurably as a result of the Government's cuts in the past 15 years. The Bill will mean yet another burden on local councils, despite what the Minister says. Having discovered that a mistake had been made, councils will have expected to get the money back and to be able to spend it on the provision of local services. When local authorities make mistakes, they have to pay for them.

The Bill is not only about mistakes: the Government have acted illegally, charging local authorities when they had no power to do so—and it has been going on for years. If local authorities had acted in a similarly illegal way, all hell would have broken loose. The Secretary of State and his Ministers would have been flying around the country demanding that heads should roll. The councils involved would be harried, ridiculed and pilloried and their councillors would be politically persecuted. Yet when the Government are found to have acted illegally, we are supposed to keep quiet about it. The practice has been going on for years without anything being done about it.

The Government seek not only to give themselves power to charge but to do so in respect of past charging errors—and they wish to perform the change "just like that", as Mr. Tommy Cooper used to say. Retrospective legislation is a very dangerous precedent. It is wrong in principle and sets an even more dangerous precedent when applied to local government. It should be used only very rarely. It should not be used when Ministers have flouted the law and the innocent—in this case the councils—are being punished.

Caries, whom I am sure that the Minister has read in preparation for the debate, states in his writing on statute law:

"A statute is to be deemed to be retrospective which takes away or impairs any vested right . . . under existing laws, or creates a new obligation or imposes a new duty."

Referring to the case of Calder *v.* Bull, Judge Chase said:

"Every law that takes away or impairs rights vested agreeably to existing laws is retrospective, is generally unjust and may be oppressive. It is a good general rule that a law should have no retrospect."

Yet those persuasive authorities have had no effect on the Government. Despite the general agreement that retrospective legislation is undesirable, the Government wish to proceed with it in this case.

The director of technical services of Durham city council, in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who had hoped to be here this afternoon, spoke for many councils when he said that the Bill would

"set an exceedingly dangerous precedent if payments which were made with legal authority could be legitimised by subsequent legislation."

As the House knows and as the Minister has briefly explained, development plans, structure plans, local plans and unitary development plans have to be the subject of public scrutiny at public local inquiries, examinations in public and hearings. Objections to the proposals are aired at such inquiries. It is a right that the public should have; it is their opportunity to comment on local plans. Such inquiries are chaired by inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State and drawn from the ranks of the Planning Inspectorate. The inspector listens to arguments and makes recommendations to the local authority. As has now become clear, from the first inquiries, Ministers have illegally charged local authorities for the services of inspectors.

The Planning Inspectorate's corporate plan for 1994-97 predicted that the demand for inspectors for development plan inquiries would remain at current levels. Since 1991, the development plans of local planning authorities have had enhanced status and planning applications are now determined in accordance with the plan unless material circumstances indicate otherwise. They are, therefore, very important parts of the planning process.

In terms of the completion of the plans, there is a long way to go. A survey published by the Minister's Department in August 1994 showed that only 60 English

districts—20 per cent.—had local plans in place by 31 March 1994. It showed that only 10 unitary authorities—15 per cent. of the total—had unitary development plans. More than 94 per cent. of English authorities are expected to have adopted plans by the end of 1996. In Scotland, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) will explain, about 81 per cent. of local plans had been adopted by the end of 1993. The Scottish Office, as I am sure the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will tell us, expects complete local coverage by the end of this year.

It was Birmingham city council that first raised the issue of the statutory basis for charging by the Secretary of State following, as the Minister has told us, the public local inquiry into the Birmingham unitary development plan. The House and the Government owe a debt of gratitude to the officers and members of Birmingham city council for their role in discovering the Government's error. I also commend the tremendous efforts made by my hon. Friends the Members for Perry Barr and for Selly Oak and by the other Birmingham Members who wrote to Ministers pointing out the error of their ways.

The Birmingham inquiry lasted from November 1991 to February 1992. The inspector's report was received in October 1992, some months later. In November, as the Minister has said, the council received an invoice for £63,000 which exceeded its budgetary provision of £28,000. The reason was not that Birmingham had, in some way, done something to put up the bill. The reason was that the inquiry lasted longer than anticipated—38 days instead of 32. In addition, there was a unilateral 30 per cent. rise in the inspectorate's day rate charges of which the council was notified shortly before the inquiry opened.

That bill was challenged on two counts: first, the size compared with what was estimated and, secondly, the statutory basis for the charge. On 24 June 1993, the assistant director of planning, Mr. Wenban Smith, wrote to the planning inspector, Mr. John, pointing out that as no regulations had been made under section 16 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 there was no statutory basis for the charge. It was further attested by Birmingham that had the charges been the same as those prescribed under the Fees for Inquiries (Standard Daily Amount) Regulations 1988—which I am sure that the Minister has studied—the bill would have been half the size. No reply was received by Birmingham city council to that letter. It was not until a year later, when Members of Parliament wrote, that the Minister's predecessor replied.

The House would have expected that on discovering the error the Government would have ensured the widest possible consultation with the associations and with individual councils so that they could implement the proposed changes, going through in great detail any proposals of legislation—but not a bit of it. In February 1994, just under a year ago, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities received a letter from the Department of the Environment referring to "some doubts" over Ministers' powers to make charges. The letter also said that "to clarify the situation" the Government intended to introduce retrospective legislation shortly.

The AMA, after consulting its members, sent a reply via Mr. Phil Harper, who wrote to the DOE objecting to the Government's proposals, especially their retrospective nature, and arguing further that in future the costs of the inspectors should be borne by the Government. The AMA received the letter from the DOE on the same day as a written answer appeared on the same subject—17 February.

More evidence of the Government's unwillingness to consult—the Minister has spoken today of consultation with the authorities—came in a letter from Mr. D. Donaldson who works in planning division 4. Mr. Donaldson was responding to a letter from the Association of District Councils dated 1 November 1994. It took six weeks to reply to that letter. Millions of pounds of local taxpayers' money has been illegally grabbed by the Government. Mr. Donaldson, no doubt under ministerial instruction, says in paragraph 2 of that letter:

> "While we understand the reasons for the Association's concern, the Department does not accept that there has been a 'significant legislative error'."

If that is not regarded as a significant legislative error requiring retrospective legislation, I wonder what is. In paragraph 3, Mr. Donaldson says:

> "The proposed legislation would be retrospective in order to validate payments which authorities have already made and to achieve equitable treatment for all planning authorities, irrespective of the time when their particular local plan inquiry was held."

So, the Government want to be fair and equitable to all concerned. They are not going to rob Peter to pay Paul—they are going to rob both Peter and Paul.

In all the consultations carried out so far, not one local authority feels that the principle of retrospection should apply. If the Act is passed, they will want payment to start from the time when the Act is passed, not from a previous decade. The local authorities say that that is a fair and honest way to proceed and the Labour party agrees.

The Minister has told us that in his view £4.5 million up to the financial year 1993 and £1.4 million up to the financial year 1994 was owed by local authorities. Just to set the mind of the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) at rest, it is not a question of Birmingham council not paying or refusing to pay up. There is no legal authority and there was no legal authority for the councils to pay at all. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want to pay a bill when he had no legal authority to do so. The bills were sent when there was no authority to do so.

I am glad that the Minister was able to take advice and tell us about the interest. But we are not talking only of a global sum of some £7 million. For local councils these are very large individual sums. For example, Chichester will have to pay almost £20,000, Rochester £17,000, and Reigate and Banstead £75,000. I have not chosen examples of hotbeds of socialism. However, I have to throw in my local area of Leicester, which will have to pay £40,000. Individual councils will have to receive and then pay back a very large sum of money.

On learning that there was no legal authority, the Planning Inspectorate refunded payments to local councils, informing them that the money would be clawed back when the legislation was passed. It must have been like a scene from the Keystone Cops. Each Minister in the Department of the Environment must have been given the responsibility of going in a fast car full of cash to hand it back to the town halls. Bearing in mind the Minister's fondness for privatisation, they perhaps engaged Group 4, or even Mr. Damon Hill, all with the same instructions: drive fast, do not stop, and if apprehended, blame it on

[Mr. Vaz]

the lawyers. I can just see the cartoon in next week's *Municipal Journal.* It would be farcical if it were not so tragic—what a way to run a Department.

We are very concerned about the scope of the charging regime. The proposed new section 303A(4) would allow the Secretary of State to recover

"the entire administrative cost of, or incidental to, the qualifying inquiry, so far as borne by him".

That appears to go well beyond the "remuneration and allowances" provision in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It appears that the Secretary of State is seeking to recover costs other than for those of appointing an inspector. When the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland replies, I hope that he will give us the cast-iron assurance that there is no intention to make charges over and above those made in the past.

Mr. Rooker: Perhaps my hon. Friend will press the point that, with regard to new section 303A(4), in addition to the amount for an inspector, the Government intend to charge for the overheads of the Department of the Environment. What on earth have the DOE's overheads got to do with appointing an inspector with a dedicated staff and a dedicated task in mind? Why should local authorities bear a share of the costs of the DOE's overheads?

Mr. Vaz: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I expected him, the hammer of the poll tax and the Opposition Member who did most to bring down that hated piece of legislation, to spot that. The proposal goes far beyond what was originally intended and far beyond the 1990 Act which refers simply to "remuneration and allowances". I hope that the Minister will give us the assurance that we need when he replies.

I believe that there is a clear need to cut the costs of inquiries. Research commissioned by the DOE showed that local inquiries can cost as much as £170,000 for local plans and £300,000 for unitary development plans. The executive summary of the "Efficiency and Effectiveness of Local Planning Inquiries" stated that some of its recommendations were intended to

"provide more certainty for local authorities and others in budgeting time"

and ensure that a more businesslike relationship should exist

"between the local authority and the planning inspectorate."

The summary document was issued for consultation on 10 November 1993. The DOE said on 21 December 1994 that the full report would be published "imminently". When the Minister replies, I hope that he will tell us the date of the report's publication. He will know that one of his colleagues said on 17 February that the report was to be published "shortly". We await the proposals with interest and wonder why it has taken a full year from executive summary to the final report. We should like to hear how the Government propose to improve the local plan process. It should not be just a booking exercise; it should be much more substantial.

Another and equally important argument goes to the heart of this matter and relates to the very principle of whether local authorities should have to pay in the first place. There is a view that, as a council is obliged by statute to prepare the plans and to hold the inquiries, the financial burden should be borne by the Government—*[Interruption.]* I notice that that view has found favour among Conservative Members. I am delighted that they agree with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities which holds that view.

Other organisations take a different view. The Royal Town Planning Institute considers that if the Government paid the cost of the inspectors that might lead to a return to the pre-1968 situation of central Government having the final say in the adoption of local development plans. The institute believes that that would not be in the interests of effective planning or local democracy.

The point is that this legislation, far from being a "wee Bill", as the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment described it, to be shoved through when no one is watching, gives us an opportunity to examine carefully a very important point of principle. We should listen to the views of the interested parties before we take a final view.

The Opposition believe that once there is a statutory basis for charging, the relationship between the council and the inspector should be formalised. It should be that of purchaser and provider. I am sure that the Minister recognises those words as he was very keen to push them forward in Wandsworth.

At present, the basis of a council's dealings with the inspectorate are open-ended in favour of the contractor. The client—the council—has very little, if any, control over the outcome in terms of the delivery date or price. The inspectorate should be required to give, and abide by, its estimates. A written statement should be provided in advance based on the circumstances of the case with any factors affecting variability—for example, sitting days—clearly identified.

There should be provision for arbitration which is binding on both parties. There should also be a mechanism for challenging a demand which a local authority considers unreasonable. Under the provisions in the Bill, the Secretary of State can merely recover the costs through the courts. There should be proper regulation to ensure that the contractor's position of power and monopoly is not abused. That is entirely in line with the Government's wish to see the inspectorate as a trading agency.

We believe that there is considerable scope for improving the operation of the inquiry scheme with regard to the greater use of written objections and shorter reports and developing a more informal approach with the local authority taking the lead in bringing objectors' concerns forward more effectively. Because of the new-found importance of development plans, it is always possible for particularly well-heeled objectors to delay the process to get their point across because they can afford expert representation. The costs of the inquiry will therefore spiral.

We believe that planning authorities should involve local people in preparing plans at a much earlier stage. It is essential that the public are able to participate as early as possible. I was very impressed by the observations of the Royal Town Planning Institute on the Government's initial proposals. I do not believe that any hon. Member would disagree with the comments of Jed Griffiths, the senior vice-president of the institute, who said:

"We need to get local people involved right at the roots of the planning process so that they can play a real role in shaping the future growth of the places where we live."

I am announcing today the establishment of a Labour party review of planning law. I hope that we will consult widely with all interested parties to make planning law a much more consumer-friendly part of legislation and the planning function much more understandable by local people. I want to see planning by local people for local people and planning for prosperity—the prosperity of local people in local areas.

Mr. Steen: In his interesting speech, which I have been following very carefully, is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that parish councils should have planning powers?

Mr. Vaz: No, I am not. Far be it from me to stand at the Dispatch Box and reorganise local government. However, there is no reason why members of parish councils should not feel that they have a role to play as members of the public and go to meetings and participate in the process.

The Government have been caught with their hands in the pockets of local authorities and we all know what happens to pickpockets. If the Government had charged the private sector without lawful authority, there would rightly be an outcry and Ministers would have to cough up and apologise. No wonder, simply to cover ministerial backs, the Bill explicitly states:

"The Bill will have no effect on businesses as regards compliance costs."

In our view, the Bill is bad and it has been drafted in haste. The Opposition have been given an assurance through the usual channels that before the Bill goes into Committee there will be a period of consultation with the associations and other interested parties. We shall hold the Government strictly to that promise. We shall therefore not vote against Second Reading today, but if we find that the Government are not prepared to consider their position on the issue of retrospection and are not willing to accept the reasonable proposals that we shall set out in Committee, I can assure the House that we shall be in a bare-knuckle fight with the Government in the later stages.

It would be improper for the House to allow the Bill to pass before the Government are rightly condemned for their actions and are able to apologise for what has happened and it would be a negation of our duty as an Opposition if we allowed the measure to reach the statute book in its present unfit and unjust state.

4.48 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): After the successful passage of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, the Government's principal new year's resolution must surely have been absolutely straightforward: "We just won't introduce new, unnecessary legislation. We will positively discriminate against passing any new laws which are not proved to be absolutely necessary." After all, that would be entirely consistent with the recent resolution of the House to reduce the number of hours that Parliament sits. Surely, if the House sits for fewer hours, prima facie it should pass fewer laws. Unfortunately, this is only the third parliamentary working day of 1995, and the House, believe it or not, is scrutinising a seemingly additional piece of legislation and adding it to the thousands of edicts that we churn out every year, many of which are entirely unnecessary.

Rather like habitual smokers, too many Ministers and their officials seem unable to resist the temptation to participate in their favourite pastime—passing laws. In most people's eyes, that is the justification for Parliament's existence, for, if we are not passing laws, what are we doing, they say. Whether laws are necessary does not seem to be questioned. Passing laws has become an end in itself, and the lifeblood and justification for the existence of Parliament. If we do not pass laws and we do not debate, we cannot justify our existence.

The addiction now has such a great hold that it seems to have affected not only Ministers of all rank but civil servants, whose modus operandi seems to be entirely dictated by how much legislation they can get their Minister to pass and how many columns of *Hansard* and how many lines on the statute book they can fill. Are the Government proposing a performance-related bonus for civil servants according to how many lines of legislation they put on the statute book?

The Bill is about the Government recovering from local authorities costs attached to certain inquiries. The inspectorate and the reporters unit has always charged for the costs involved in development plan inquiries. Indeed, even without any statutory basis, local authorities have paid up without much problem, to my knowledge, other than in the significant Birmingham case.

Why did Birmingham challenge the legal basis of charging? As I recollect, it questioned it because the planning inspector was extremely dilatory in delivering his report. Birmingham said, "If you are charging us for this report, we would like it promptly. If you do not give it to us promptly, we will withhold payment." That seems to be a perfectly legitimate argument.

In short, the existing system has worked well, even without statutory force. Therefore, one must ask: "What are the benefits of moving from a successful consensual agreement to a formal legislative framework?" Why take up the time of the House? Why increase legislation on the statute book, with all the associated bureaucracy? Why do we not leave matters voluntary? That is what the Conservative party is all about.

Has the Birmingham challenge led to a flurry of similar cases from other local authorities? I do not believe that it has. The Government, not local authorities, have reacted. If there has been such a flood, it may be because of unconscionable and unreasonable delays in producing reports. It is a bit rich to clobber local authorities with a statute compelling them to pay if, at the same time, there is no local authority charter.

I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Minister will think about a local authority charter which would ensure high standards of practice and which must include the prompt production of reports. It seems perfectly right that a local authority, if it is asked to pay for such reports, can say that there must be a charter which says that reports must be produced in two months, or there will be a reduction in charges made—just as, under the charter, one receives 20 per cent. back if a train arrives more than an hour late.

There is another question: should charges be imposed at all? The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) touched on that point. Local authorities are obliged to prepare plans. That is the law. However, whenever plans are drafted, individual objections from local people are

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

bound to follow. That is our democratic process, which we encourage. An examination in public is therefore inevitable.

I was a member of the Standing Committee which considered the Planning Compensation Act 1991. I was particularly enthusiastic about that legislation, which made it the statutory responsibility of every authority to draw up a local plan and to keep it up to date. Since 1991, such plans have had enhanced status, as the hon. Member for Leicester, East mentioned. The aim of local plans is to ensure that authorities develop their areas according to a rational process, with the fullest public consultation. That is what local accountability is all about.

What happens? The Government actuaries in Holborn, using the most modern technology, analyse the demographic profile of regions and projects and see what is required in the next 10 or 20 years. They have what might be described as a crystal ball in Holborn. They look into it and ask, "What is required in each region of Britain? How many houses, schools, hospitals and roads are needed?" They produce a picture from Holborn—I do not know why it is from Holborn, but that is where they seem to be—and they present it to the Department of the Environment. Estimates are produced, based on their demographic profiles of births, divorces, deaths, employment figures and so on. At the end of the period—abracadabra—they say how much is required in each region of the country.

For example, in respect of Devon—my area—the actuaries say, "We should have another 60,000 houses by the turn of the century." They then ask, "Why 60,000? Let's make it 90,000 houses." In the south-east of England—I do not think that anyone has an idea how many houses there will be in many Conservative constituencies—there will be nearly 1 million more houses by the turn of the century.

That is what those people in Holborn are doing, looking into their crystal ball. In fact, if there are 960,000 more houses in the south-east of England by the turn of the century, it will be a continuous urban area. It will be a suburban area. There will be no countryside from London to Brighton.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I stayed in the Chamber to hear my hon. Friend, because what he says is usually good value. He raises an important subject. He will be interested to know that the Somerset branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, an organisation which would not oppose the traditional conservatism that my hon. Friend and I support, has written to me suggesting that the assumption that previous tendencies of people to migrate, particularly to retire to the south-west, should now be questioned and that housing and other developments should also be questioned. The south-west of England, which my hon. Friend and I represent, would otherwise be greatly disadvantaged by the developments that might follow.

Mr. Steen: It was very kind of my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) to make such gracious remarks about my contributions in the House. May I make, similarly, a comment about his interventions? They are well known always to be of very good value and of very good sense. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

The Government are advised by civil servants in Holborn, who are very brilliant, wear glasses and gaze into crystal balls, and who believe that there should be 60,000 more houses in Devon and nearly 1 million more in the south-east. At the end of the relevant period, they get the houses, because planners and politicians build the houses, and they say, "There we are, we told you that they were needed." That has been happening in Somerset, Devon and the south-east.

I question the assumption that is made, and I also question the process. Planners and politicians do great disservice to our local communities by burdening them with more homes, schools, hospitals and roads than are needed. They distort migration patterns in this country by building those houses.

Mr. Vaz: Does the hon. Gentleman consider that the Government should bear the costs of a local inquiry?

Mr. Steen: That is the thrust of my argument.

My modest local South Hams district council is one of the best in the country, and is regularly mentioned in dispatches as providing good value for money. I am questioning why, if the Government are committed to the democratic process and to consultation and have passed an Act saying that local plans must be drawn up, they do not pay part of the cost. I question that concept.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have made it plain twice to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and others that, through the standard spending assessment and the RSG, the Government have done that, and continue to do so.

Mr. Steen: I do not think that I should get involved in a discussion between the occupants of the two Front Benches as to who should pay. However, there is a point—

Mr. David Nicholson: Would my hon. Friend be interested to know that West Somerset district council, which covers part of my constituency and is Conservative and independent-controlled, has written to me expressing the same concerns and suggesting that, if the costs of inquiries are to be changed as a result of the Bill, that fact should at least be reflected in the SSA? The council also made the same point as my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) about retrospection.

Mr. Steen: Those are all good points, and I know that the Minister is aware of the issues, as he is one of the Ministers with the most experience of local government. Having heard what my hon. Friend said about West Somerset council, which is not a hotbed of left-wing socialism—at least, not at the moment—I am sure that, when the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland winds up, he will be extremely circumspect. With discussions through the normal channels, I am sure that some improvement can be made.

What I am saying—I hope that it is of some help to the House—is that the Department of the Environment hands down the housing allocations it believes necessary for the county, rather like Moses with his tablets. The county then offloads the numbers on to the district or city council. There is then an argy-bargy between the district and the county about where the exact numbers are to go. Revised numbers are then sent back to the Department for approval.

The whole process is therefore triggered by the Government sending down a diktat that so many new homes and new roads are to be built, and so much new employment is to be found, and then that there must be so many schools to deal with the children who will live in the homes, so many hospitals to deal with the elderly and the ill who will live in them, and so on. Local inquiries arise because Government have initiated the process.

If things were otherwise, local plans would be development programmes based on what local people felt could be managed locally. What we now have is the opposite—a reaction to a Government edict handed down to the county for consideration by local people. The flow is from the top downwards, not from the local people upwards. It is therefore not surprising that, when local people are faced with a Government proposal for an influx of new construction, they lodge objections and rightly demand an inquiry. Why should local authorities pick up the whole tab for that process, which has been instigated by central Government and their officials?

The Government must think about that again—not only about the fact that local participation in matters for which the Government have been a catalyst is penalised, but about the wider attitude towards legislation. The beginning of 1995 should have been a time to signal that we have learnt the lessons of the past and we shall halt the passage of new legislation. Yet here we go again with more legislation. There is always a good reason for it, no doubt, but there is no point in passing a major Act of Parliament saying that we will deregulate and reduce the existing level of legislation if we then pass new legislation to take its place.

There seems little inclination or inducement to get hold of this virulent disease by the short and curlies and stop the legislative machine grinding out more and more laws. The reason is simple: Ministers' careers depend on passing laws. The more laws they pass, the more credit they get, and they move up the ladder. That is how the whole system works. No wonder the deregulation process is in difficulties. If a Minister does not come to the House with legislation to pass, he is considered inept and unenthusiastic. "What is he doing?" people ask, and he will be out.

The House is sitting for fewer hours now, but that will have virtually no impact on the growth of statute law that makes us one of the most over-governed, over-bureaucratic nations in the world. It is no good complaining about the nanny state if we do little to curtail its all-pervasive and all-embracing nature.

5.4 pm

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): The Minister said that the Bill was merely technical, but for me it is much more than just a technical Bill. I speak as someone who was the chairman of a planning committee for six or seven years many moons ago, and I know the delicate balancing act that planning authorities, whether at district, county or city level, have to perform week after week and month after month. I am sure that the Minister, with his local government experience, knows it too.

I well remember local plans being drawn up, especially in my constituency. That was a mandatory requirement on local planning authorities. Because of his local government experience, the Minister will also know that there are two conflicting forces acting in any planning matter. One is the local population, who may not want expansion in their area; theirs is a legitimate grievance. The other force, which is becoming more difficult for local authorities to deal with, is that exerted by people with large tracts of land who want to develop them against local authorities' wishes.

What brings some democracy and equity to the process is the fact that there will be a planning inquiry. I shall say more later about the retrospection, and whether a charge should be made in the first place, but I believe that it is an affront to the democratic process to charge anything for those due processes to be carried out. Among the facts to come to light at the planning inquiry will be the pressure that local authorities now have to face, especially from well-heeled planning applicants.

When such a person makes a planning application, the local authority by due process may refuse it on legitimate grounds. I know that I am straying slightly off the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I shall attach what I am saying to the main theme. When a planning application is refused by the local authority, it may go to appeal and the inspector may approve it, overturning the local authority's decision. The local authority may then have to pay a considerable sum to the applicant.

I hope that the Minister will understand that, in the planning committee, at the back of the ordinary local councillor's mind is the fear that, when a powerful person with plenty of money makes a planning application that local people do not want, it is getting more difficult to refuse, because in the end there may be a financial penalty for everyone else to pay.

The planning system is based on democracy and on local people having an input. That is why the statutory mandatory requirement for local plans and unitary development plans should be funded directly by the Government. It has all come about because the Government, especially the Department of the Environment, have been found to be acting without due process of law. The Government should not have been charging what local councils had to pay for public inquiries in the past.

It is ludicrous that the Government should seek to legitimise their errors of the past in this way. That goes against all natural justice. I do not know whether my own local authority has a financial interest in this or whether it has paid out money for this purpose, but it is incensed that the Government seem to be acting illegally by bringing before Parliament a Bill to legitimise their past actions.

Even worse, the Government are trying to make the legislation retrospective. Until one of his colleagues pulled him up, the Minister kept talking about RSGs. I thought that the rate support grant went out with the poll tax—

Sir Paul Beresford: Revenue support grant.

Mr. Olner: Whether we talk about RSGs or SSAs, we would be hard pushed to find any local authority in the United Kingdom that could identify within its SSA any money given it for this purpose, so that it could pay the money back should there be a need for a local inquiry. I do not believe that any such money has been given to local authorities.

I fear that this is the thin end of the wedge. The Bill details charges for the inspector and his officials and for other costs. All that breaches the principle of free planning

[Mr. Olner]

inquiries. In future, they will have to be paid for when a planning inspector is involved. That will erode the democratic right of communities to lodge planning appeals. I therefore urge the Government seriously to think about the legislation again.

I wish now that, when I told my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) yesterday that I wanted to speak in this debate, we had decided to force a vote on the Bill—especially having heard what other hon. Members have had to say about it since then. Few of them seem to favour this piece of legislation.

5.12 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): We have heard a remarkable speech by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). He wrongly blamed the Government, who he said demanded illegal payments from local authorities. On the contrary: it was the Labour Government who brought in the original legislation, which was presumably carefully thought through and scrutinised by the House of Commons. For more than 20 years local authorities and the Department of the Environment have been implementing the will of the House, which was that local authorities should pay the costs of planning inspectors—

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. It was not the will of Parliament that the charges should be borne in that way. The will of Parliament was that no charges should be made.

Dr. Twinn: The hon. Gentleman deliberately misunderstands me. It may be his job as a lawyer to play with words, but let us keep to the simple truth of the matter. At the time, Parliament thought that it was asking local authorities to pay these costs, since when the Department of the Environment has asked local authorities to pay them. They in turn believed that that was the law and were content with it—until Birmingham discovered that it was not the law. I do not blame Birmingham for finding out that what everyone thought was the law actually was not, and then exploiting that fact.

Unless we pass this Bill, to restore the status quo ante, we shall have to adjust standard spending assessments to recoup the money that local authorities have been allowed against paying for these costs.

I do not agree with Opposition Members who think that a point of principle is at stake and that it is right that central Government should pay the whole cost of the planning inspector; nor do I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). He should beware of his own arguments—

Mr. Steen: They were good though.

Dr. Twinn: I do not agree. My hon. Friend is worried about civil servants in the DOE inflicting population growth on his area. I share that concern, because I represent a suburban constituency in London, restricted by the green belt, and development is thrust back on us because the shire counties do not want it. We have no choice but to become town-crowned because of that.

I should like local authorities to have a certain amount of freedom to speak independently. He who pays the piper calls the tune. If my hon. Friend suggests that the DOE picks up the tab, I suspect that we shall gradually accept the principle that the DOE has every right to dictate what the result of an inquiry should be. At the moment we have a nicely balanced system of local planning inquiries; the DOE Planning Inspectorate supervises it, but the process is independent. The DOE does not interfere with the contents of the reports, but inspectors report back their draft recommendations to local authorities, which then have a chance to feed through their views to the inspectors.

This is a pleasant and useful system in which local authorities pay for the inspectors' time and in return expect to have some say in the interpretation and presentation of the reports.

Mr. Steen: What I am really saying is that we do not need this Bill. We can simply rearrange the SSAs to deduct some money from local authorities. If we are the party of deregulation we must not pass more regulations.

The independence of the process is not affected one way or the other, because either way the Government pay for it—by sending out the bill and getting the money back, or by deducting it from SSAs.

Dr. Twinn: I always hesitate to discuss the complexities of local government finance, although I used to understand it when I taught it. I certainly do not understand all its details today. This week I went to see the Secretary of State at the DOE with the Labour leader of Enfield council to talk about this year's SSA, and I understood less at the end of the meeting than I did at the beginning.

We should not make SSA calculations more complicated than they already are. I would rather stick with the principle that local authorities be paid a lump sum which they can decide how to spend. That sum should include an amount representing the cost of employing a planning inspector. This legislation is necessary to return the situation to what we thought it was before Birmingham discovered that it was not.

If local authorities really are concerned about the rising costs of local public inquiries, perhaps they should look more carefully at how they develop their local plans—that might be more productive. I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Member for Leicester, East about the need for more public participation and consultation. If we involve more groups of people earlier in the planning process, it is much more likely that local plans will emerge with local consent and that there will be fewer objections to them. That will lead to cheaper inquiries.

I also agree with what the hon. Member for Leicester, East said about the Royal Town Planning Institute, which has pointed out that we might have expected an earlier response from my right hon. and hon. Friends at the DOE, following consultations on the document, in respect of improving local plans. We might have expected the introduction of more formal agreements between local authorities and planning inspectors about the format and costing arrangements for inquiries.

If that were something on which Front-Bench Members on both sides of the House would get together while we await the Bill's consideration in Committee, I would wholeheartedly approve. If something were put into the Bill to allow a new agreement between the Planning Inspectorate and local authorities, we could improve the system and address some of the concerns that local authorities genuinely have. For example, an inspector

might fall ill after his inquiry and not produce the report. The local authority might be faced with the cost of a second inquiry, which would be completely unreasonable. So there are concerns for my hon. Friends on the Front Bench to answer.

The principle of the Bill is that local authorities should pay for the costs of planning inspectors. We should go back to what we thought that the previous Labour Government had passed in 1977. The Bill should be welcomed by the House and passed.

5.20 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I do not intend to detain the House for long, as I believe that most hon. Members are in agreement with the general principle that it is right that local authorities should pay the costs of plans and the inquiries that go with them. I also recognise that a number of the points that I might have made have been made already by other hon. Members; it is important that we should all learn not to repeat ourselves too frequently and I hope not to do that this afternoon.

There are one or two points, however, that need to be added to the debate. One point that was mentioned by more than one hon. Member is whether there will be any extra costs as a result of the Bill. The Minister gave us some assurance that, as far as the inquiries that have already taken place are concerned, no extra costs will be added to those that are now charged to local authorities. He was, perhaps, a little bit woolly on the question of interest, but I hope that he will clarify that later.

The Minister was fairly clear that there would be no extra costs, but was less clear on whether they would apply to all future inquiries as well. That point has already been raised and I ask the Minister to give assurance that, in future, perhaps as a result of the consultation that he has promised us between the Bill's Second Reading and its consideration in Committee, costs charged to local authorities for inquiries will be along precisely the same lines as those traditionally charged and that no extra costs will be added.

It is, of course, true that plans and inquiries are becoming more difficult and complex all the time, partly because of the number of objections to them nowadays. That is not entirely unexpected, because the amount of money that is involved in development permissions is very great and we must expect that many people will be concerned to ensure that the inquiries produce the result that is financially beneficial to them; not only the small man who, perhaps, wishes to amend or improve his house in some way but some of the larger vested interests that have a lot of money that they can apply to the costs of getting involved in inquiries.

It is also true that inquiries are about plans, which, every year, become more important as the Government insist on them being followed more strictly and give greater weight to what is in structure plans or local district plans. That means that the pressure on people to take part in inquiries, to involve themselves and therefore perhaps lengthen an inquiry, is growing all the time.

Inquiries are unpredictable. It is difficult to tell how long an inquiry will take and therefore how much it will cost. That makes it difficult for local authorities to budget sensibly for the costs of their inquiries. One of the points made to me by several local government officers is that no choice is allowed in who is to be the inspector for any inquiry. While I would not like to see local councils given the right to choose their own inspector so that they might, perhaps, choose one whom they knew would give them exactly what they wanted, there is an argument for saying that some element of choice should be allowed. After all, one would have thought that the Government themselves, with their reliance on market forces, might give some credence to the idea that, if local authorities were allowed to choose between inspectors, they would be more keen to choose one whom they knew to be more efficient and effective and who would run their inquiries well. Perhaps those who were found to be less effective in the past would be less likely to be asked to undertake inquiries in the future. Some element of market forces in that way might be rather attractive to the Government. I hope so.

We need some form of guidance about what to expect from our inspectors. The Government are keen on charters at the moment. Perhaps there should be an inspectors charter, which would lay down some ground rules on how they would work and what local authorities could expect from them.

The point was made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) that the Bill is a missed opportunity. He thought that there was a chance to include some ways of amending and improving the whole local planning process. I, too, would like to know when the Government expect to announce the improvements, which, perhaps, they hope to make as a result of the consultation. That has not yet been announced and we would very much welcome an early announcement.

Perhaps most importantly, there is a great failing in the present planning system in that there is very little opportunity for the small man to have a real say. The large organisations, which are well funded and the local authorities themselves, which are comparatively well funded, have a much better chance of getting their way in an inquiry than the small individual who perhaps does not have the money or expertise of the big boys. That is a basic and fundamental flaw in the present planning system and we need to seek ways to overcome it. There is some opportunity for local authorities to do that, and I am proud and happy to say that my own Liberal Democrat-run authority in Newbury currently proposes that some money should be set aside to provide expertise for objectors to our local plan. It might seem a rather odd idea that one should try to help people to object to something that one is proposing, but there is a good argument for it, not only on fairness, as that is obvious, but on finance.

One of the difficulties of local planning inquiries and one of the reasons why they cost such a lot is that some of the objectors are not good at setting out their objections. They do not really know how to make their objections well. As a result, it takes a lot longer than it might to go through them to work out whether they are valid. There is a good case for saying that it may save money in the long run if local authorities provided some means for the little man to gain expertise. That can be done now, but to make it more widespread the Government must recognise that need and the fact that it may increase costs to local authorities.

The Minister has already given an assurance that the costs of inquiries will be met through SSAs and local grants. I believe that that cost of giving expertise—or the right to expertise—to objectors should also be met through SSAs and local grants. I hope that that and other

[Mr. David Rendel]

potential costs, as the costs of inquiries are met, will be fully met through SSAs. I ask the Minister to give that assurance today.

5.27 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) thinks that the Bill constitutes a missed opportunity, as he would have liked to see attached to it various other rather vague planning provisions, whereas my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) thinks that it is unnecessary and should not have been introduced in the first place, because we should be deregulating and not adding to regulation.

The Bill has the virtue of simplicity. It is clear, straightforward and necessary, because once we discovered that the Government might be acting ultra vires, we had to put matters right. Before Christmas, I sent a copy of the Bill to the director of planning services of South Bucks district council, to ask him for his views. He said that it was his professional opinion that

"It seems reasonable for local Councils to pay a fair level of costs for the services of inspectors and I think it would be difficult to object to the legislation. I would hope, though, that the levels of charges subsequently fixed by Ministers reflect a reasonable balance between recovering the Inspectorates costs while not draining the limited resources of local authorities."

If my hon. Friend looks at page ii of the Bill, he will see that it says that the Bill

"will have no effect on public service manpower."

It will also have

"no effect on businesses as regards compliance costs."

So its regulatory burden is relatively limited. However, I agree with my hon. Friend when he says that we should do everything that we can to ensure that we stop the great tide of legislation.

The director of planning services of South Bucks district council also made a point about recent developments with local planning inquiries. He said that they

"are becoming extremely long and costly as more and more people exercise their right to object (e.g. the Wycombe plan had more than 500 objections)."

That raises an important point, to which the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) referred. I agree that we should involve local people as much as possible in the planning process and explain it to local people. They do not understand precisely how it works. For example, parish councils have been referred to. Their role is commonly misunderstood. They have no authority over planning matters, yet all the parish councils in my constituency have planning committees. They go through the planning applications and decide whether they should be accepted or rejected.

People say, "Beaconsfield town council rejected that planning application. Shouldn't that be the end of the matter?" One then has to explain that the committee is there only in an advisory role. That involves local people, which is what we want, but it is the district council that is the planning authority.

That planning application may then go to the district council planning committee. If it rejects it, it will then go to the Secretary of State, and his inspector, apparently considering the application on its merits against exactly the same criteria, the same planning guidance from the Department and the same county structure plan and district plan, may come to exactly the opposite conclusion to the parish and district council planning committees. Such an application could relate to just one house, an infill in Beaconsfield somewhere.

How does one explain that a district council planning committee can come to a completely opposite decision on such a matter judged against the same criteria? In the end, such matters become highly subjective. We need to do more to explain the planning process to local people as well as involving them.

There is another aspect that I wish to mention to my hon. Friend the Minister. I have written to him about this, but I feel strongly about it. A number of major developments can be proposed in one relatively small area at the same time, but at the moment the planning process is incapable of taking into account the potential effect of all of them. Each one has to be considered individually on its merits and it is not open to an inspector to consider other applications that may be in the pipeline at the same time.

I have an extreme example of that in the villages of Dorney and Taplow in my constituency. Those villages form a green lung between the conurbations of Slough and Maidenhead; a tongue of green between the two.

Mr. Steen: That will not last long.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right. It will not last long because of the tremendous development pressure. The Secretary of State has approved a planning application from Eton college for the construction of a rowing lake 2 km long and 0.5 km wide in the village of Dorney. He has also approved a new five-mile stretch of the River Thames that is to be constructed by the National Rivers Authority to benefit the people of Maidenhead who live on the other side of the river. Those two huge planning applications, both involving millions of pounds, were being considered at the same time, but one inspector could not consider the other. In the end, the two were approved.

Now it is proposed to widen the M4 from three to seven lanes in each direction. Again, that proposal will be considered on its merits. The overall impact of all those developments will not be considered by any one inspector. That is a fundamental flaw in the planning system, which needs to be addressed. We need to explain to local people why it arises and what we shall do to address it.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise those matters because planning, the protection of the environment and the green belt are important issues in my constituency. I have given examples of ways in which people do not understand the planning process. We need to do more to involve them and more to explain the system to them.

5.34 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I want to make only a brief contribution and I shall follow the example of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) by not repeating points that other hon. Members have made.

The more that I think about the Bill, the more I listen to the Minister and the more I study the notes on clauses, the more I realise that the Bill could equally be entitled, "Birmingham Catches the Tory Government . Out Retribution Bill". That sums it up.

It has been said that the Bill is needed to put right mistakes made by Harold Wilson's Labour Government in the 1960s, when most hon. Members here now were probably at school. However, I remind hon. Members that the Bill amends the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Therefore, it is not all the fault of Harold Wilson's Labour Government in the 1960s. It is the fault of the way in which the House of Commons operates. We do not fully scrutinise or understand the consequences of the legislation that we pass. I hope that, with the new mood accompanying the Jopling reforms, we shall pay a little more attention to what we are legislating for.

I should make it clear that Birmingham city council in no way objects in principle to paying for planning inquiries. There is no argument about that. It is an important part of local authority responsibility. A briefing note from Birmingham city council says:

"However, the principle that the local authority should be responsible for its Development Plan is more important, and the City Council would not wish to argue with the *principle* of being charged for inspectors services."

Another point which has been touched on and which will certainly be raised in Committee and on Report concerns the contractual arrangements between inspectors and local authorities. That matter should be considered in detail. The Bill does not address that, but it can be raised by way of amendment to the long title.

For the local authority to pick the inspector is going a little too far, but there should be some competition. However, these days legislation allows schools to appoint their own inspectors. It is not like the old days, when they had no say in the matter. Therefore, there is an argument for bringing in, if not the full rigours of the market, a degree of competition, particularly in view of the way in which Birmingham suffered—I use that word in a general sense—a vast increase in the inspector's charges just before the inquiry took place. That point cannot be repeated too often.

Furthermore, the inspector's charges on Birmingham, as on other authorities, for a day when visits take place are the same as for when the inquiry is taking place. I understand that that is done to keep the accounts simple, but there is an argument for differential charging.

I regret that I shall not be available to serve on the Standing Committee on the Bill, so I shall make one point now on the detail of the Bill. I have referred to the Department's overheads, but new section 303A(6) in clause 1 suggests that local authorities could be charged for an inquiry that does not take place as if it had taken place. If an inquiry does not take place, it is fine to charge for the set-up and administrative costs, but to be charged on the basis of what an inquiry would have cost if it had taken place is outrageous. I shall leave that point to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench who are far more experienced than I am in such nit-picking and will have the opportunity to do so in Committee.

I have some partisan criticism to make across the Chamber. I have detected some NIMBYism this afternoon. Listening to the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), one could be forgiven for forgetting that he was once the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree. I was in the House when he was and he would not have made that speech then. Then his constituents from Liverpool holidayed in the west country, bringing jobs into that part of the world. They are now being told, "You can't come and live here." That is what he is telling my constituents—people from Birmingham and elsewhere in the west midlands, thousands of whom spend joyous periods in the west country. One of the problems is that the M5 gets blocked up. The countryside of Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Wiltshire is beautiful and much enjoyed by my constituents, some of whom decide to live in the area. That is their right as citizens, and I do not see why the hon. Member for South Hams wants to stop them.

The issue goes beyond that, however. People who now live in the west country may want their children to have homes, so that they can remain in what has become their county. That will not be possible without new buildings—extra buildings and replacements, which are the same in some senses. At the present rate of replacement, every home in the country has to last about 900 years. Listening to hon. Members from the south-east, one would think that we wanted to concrete the area. Of course we do not. Hon. Members should not use such extravagant language when we are discussing people's homes: people should have a fair amount of choice about where they live, and the extravagant language of hon. Members from the south-east and south-west ruins their case.

Mr. David Nicholson: My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and I were merely questioning, and suggesting that the House question, some of the rather extravagant demographic predictions made by people in Holborn, which my hon. Friend graphically described.

Mr. Rooker: I was Labour spokesman on housing and construction for about three years. During that time, I discussed whether the south-east and south-west should have new towns or villages, or whether we should go for infills to complete the circles of some of the villages. That arrangement, which would stop the linear flow, seemed much more sensible to me.

When Birmingham first raised the issue early in 1994, the Department of the Environment did not respond. One Birmingham Member of Parliament does not like to be called a Birmingham Member, but nevertheless represents at least 70,000 Birmingham citizens. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name him."] I am referring to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). He does not appear on any list of Birmingham Members, because Sutton Coldfield is the only constituency in the city that does not include the prefix "Birmingham". That conveniently allows the right hon. Gentleman to give the impression that he is not a Birmingham Member. I did not give the right hon. Gentleman notice that I would mention him, but I did not think it necessary to do so; in any event, we have engaged in correspondence on the subject.

Early in 1994, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was masterminding a vicious Tory party political broadcast attack on Birmingham city council. It was proved that every point that the Tories made about the council was a lie. I am not surprised that a block was put on the Department of the Environment. It was a case of, "Well, Minister, Birmingham has caught us out on this planning matter. We must go to the House of Commons and secure a change in the legislation, because we have been illegally—criminally—charging local authorities all over the country money that we had no right to charge them." Ministers at the Department have slagged off Birmingham at virtually every opportunity.

I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for not rising to the bait presented by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), who invited him to attack

[Mr. Rooker]

Birmingham city council again. The Prime Minister has learnt his lesson. When Ministers attack the council, it usually bites back, and we end up with more votes than we had before they began attacking us.

I also pay tribute to my colleagues, the members and officers of Birmingham city council, for what they have achieved. They do not seek to wipe out what has happened in the past or to escape paying charges; they have no argument with what they understand to be a point of principle. They have, however, taken the opportunity to raise other issues, such as retrospection and the contractual arrangements between the inspectorate and the city council. For that, we all owe the council a vote of thanks.

5.43 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who opened the debate, described this as a wee Bill. We have had a wee debate as well, in terms of numbers present rather than quality.

Opposition Members have made excellent speeches, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones). I know that their speeches were especially appreciated by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz).

Every speech has referred to clauses 1 and 2, which apply to England and Wales. As a Scottish Member, I dare not comment on those clauses in any detail. As Conservative Members may know, we in Scotland have a separate planning system and, indeed, a separate system of local government; we even have separate central Government machinery in the form of the Scottish Office, which spends more than £14 billion a year in Scotland—unaccountably—and employs more than 7,000 civil servants.

We are so different that we have not only separate clauses in Bills of this kind but, in some instances, separate legislation and a separate Committee structure in the House of Commons. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who is present, knows that Scottish Office Ministers have even introduced a range of innovative procedures that demonstrate the distinctive way in which Scotland is treated in the House. I believe that all that justifies Opposition Members' case for a Scottish Parliament: clauses 3 and 4 should really be debated not here but in the Scottish Parliament that a Labour Government will set up after the next election.

None the less, I welcome the opportunity to debate the Scottish clauses, especially clause 4. *[Laughter.]* Since I became a Front Bencher I have not had many opportunities to debate any variety of clause 4. I also thank the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland for the briefing with Scottish Office civil servants that he arranged earlier today, which I attended, about the Scottish part of the Bill.

Will the Under-Secretary confirm that the only plans in Scotland that will be affected by the Bill are the local plans of district planning authorities? The Minister who opened the debate referred to structure plans in Scotland, but I should like a Scottish Office Minister to confirm that they will not be affected.

In theory, the Bill covers the proposals relating to simplified planning zones in Scotland. Will the Under-Secretary confirm, however—as there have been no inquiries about the provisions in that regard—that those provisions will not be affected either?

The Minister who opened the debate said that clauses 1 and 3 would have the same underlying objective and effect—clause 1 in England and Wales, and clause 3 in Scotland. If that is so, will the Under-Secretary explain the different language used in the two clauses? Clause 1 refers to the entire administrative cost of the inquiry being recovered, but clause 3, which applies to Scotland, refers only to the Secretary of State for Scotland having regard to the general staff costs and overheads, and to general administration costs. According to the notes on clauses, the full cost to the Scottish Office will be recovered, but I should like the Minister to explain the difference in the language, and tell us whether that difference implies any difference in the application of the clauses to the respective countries involved.

Paragraph 94 of the notes on clauses states that some Scottish local authorities have asked the Secretary of State for Scotland to repay the sums that he collected illegally from them. In his introductory remarks, the Minister said that that was not so. I should be grateful if the Scottish Office Minister would clarify the position: have any Scottish local authorities asked for that money to be repaid? If so, which authorities were they? If any authorities were to make such a request, what response would they receive from the Scottish Office? If the money was repaid, what would be outcome if the Bill were enacted? Would they be required to pay the money back to the Secretary of State for Scotland?

Clause 4 requires Scottish local authorities to repay to the Secretary of State for Scotland any sums that have been returned to them by the Secretary of State. It appears that, unlike for England and Wales, there is no provision in clauses 3 or 4 for recovery in Scotland of that sum as a civil debt. If it was necessary to give the Secretary of State for Scotland the power to recover money from Scottish local authorities, why has it not been considered necessary to give him the means to recover it? Why is there no civil procedure for the Secretary of State for Scotland to recover that money, as there is in England and Wales? If he wants the money back, how will he set about getting it?

The Bill's origins lie in a House of Lords ruling, which I suppose was within the context of English law. Has that ruling any force in Scotland? Is it likely to be tested in the Scottish courts? More important, if the ruling were contested by a Scottish local authority, how would that affect the Scottish provisions of the Bill? Would the clauses be suspended while that case was tested in the Scottish courts, and if the Bill's Scottish provisions were suspended would the provisions of the whole Bill be suspended? I should be grateful if the Minister could make that clear.

The Bill confirms that since 1968 successive Labour and Tory Governments have acted illegally. The point is not to try to lay blame and say whether a Labour or a Tory Government were originally at fault. The reality is that Governments of both parties have made charges to local authorities for which there was no statutory provision.

The Government have been in power for almost 16 years and would have carried on making illegal charges to local authorities without the intervention of Birmingham city council, to which the whole country is indebted. Will the Minister confirm that if local authorities had acted in a fashion similar to that of successive Governments they would not have received the same sympathetic treatment? Would they have been allowed to keep or reclaim the money that they had collected illegally? Would they have had the benefit of retrospective legislation? The answers to the questions are obvious. Local authorities would not have been allowed to get any money back, nor would they have been given the benefit of retrospective legislation.

Why do not the Government simply accept that central Government have made a mistake, that they should pay the price for that mistake and that they should repay to local government the moneys that they collected from them illegally?

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East spoke of the dangerous precedent that has been established in that respect. It seems that local government payments in Scotland, England and Wales can be legitimised by subsequent legislation. That means that retrospective local government legislation is now an acceptable way of handling that. If that is so, the Government are establishing a dangerous precedent.

My hon. Friends have promised the Government a bare-knuckle fight in Committee and on Report. I accept that the Bill has much less serious implications for Scotland than it has for England and Wales, but my hon. Friends may be assured that they will have the support of every Scottish Labour Member in that fight with the Government.

5.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): The Opposition reply to this interesting debate was opened with considerable rhetorical flourish by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). I agree with the analysis of the Bill by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion). It is correct to say that for 21 years successive Governments have been working on a certain assumption, as have local authorities north and south of the border.

As hon. Members have recognised, everyone was acting in perfectly good faith until the matter was challenged in the courts by Birmingham city council. I tell Birmingham Members that I certainly make no criticism of Birmingham city council for doing that: it had the right to do so. As a consequence of its action and as a result of the Government responding quickly and decisively, an area of considerable doubt will be clarified.

I confirm the reference by the hon. Member for Leicester, East to consultations with local authority associations before the Bill goes into Committee. I understand that that is a matter for discussion through the usual channels. The hon. Members for Leicester, East and for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and other hon. Members mentioned the scope of costs to be recovered by the inspectorate. I reassure the House that there is no intention of increasing the costs to be recovered from planning authorities. In England, the amounts recovered will be the inspector's salary, travel and subsistence costs and the inspectorate's administrative support costs. Those sums will be specified at a composite daily rate in regulations to be made under powers in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) spoke about costs being incurred when an inquiry did not take place. That applies when a planning authority starts the process of a inquiry and then decides not to have one. The other detailed point was made by the hon. Member for Dundee, East, who said that the respective provisions north and south of the border differ. They differ not in intent or objective, but because the travel and subsistence costs of reporters in Scotland are paid under a different Scottish planning Act that does not apply south of the border.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) spoke about the local authorities charter. In England and Wales, the Planning Inspectorate will begin to offer a service agreement to each authority after a draft agreement has been discussed with local authority associations. That will specify a certain level of service that the inspectorate will aim to achieve.

My hon. Friend also made a number of points about the effect of the planning system in the south-east and the south-west of England. He said that he thought that I would be circumspect in responding to those points in my speech. He is correct. I propose to be extremely circumspect and will just say that the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), has listened carefully to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members who have rightly used the opportunity to make some more general comments on the planning system.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said that Ministers receive promotion based on the number and length of Bills that they introduce. I was sorry to hear that because I have no intention of introducing any Bills during this Session. I humbly say to my hon. Friend that the Bill is a short one of only five clauses.

The hon. Members for Leicester, East and for Newbury and my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams and others raised the issue of local or central payments. All hon. Members have received from the Royal Town Planning Institute a briefing that puts the case for local payment, and therefore local control, very clearly and decisively. Interestingly, as the hon. Member for Perry Barr confirmed, Birmingham city council, which raised the legal action, is questioning not that principle but simply the legislative basis for payment.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Minister enlighten the House on the question of interest payments from the date that the money was given back to local authorities during the last year to the date when it might be repayable if the Bill is passed? Who will be responsible for those payments? Will local authorities have to give back the interest for that short period or will they be allowed to keep it?

Mr. Stewart: As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment made clear, if local authorities have received interest payments they will be required to pay them back.

Mr. Vaz: I am sorry to press the Minister, but I am referring not to interest received but to interest from the time the payment is made to the local authority to the time

[Mr. Vaz]

that it must repay the money to the Government following enactment of the Bill. I am concerned with that short period.

Mr. Stewart: I am genuinely trying to help the hon. Gentleman. My understanding is that where the interest has been repaid on sums repaid, the amount of that interest will be recoverable by the inspectorate if the Bill becomes law. I hope that that makes the matter clear to the hon. Gentleman. If, on reading *Hansard*, I find that I have not made the position clear, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*—and to the hon. Member for Perry Barr, who is showing an interest.

Mr. Rooker: I refer to my original intervention in the speech of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. I understand that some interest has been repaid. Will the Scottish Office Minister now say that the actual cash sum of the original principal plus the interest is the only money to be repaid? In other words, will he say that no one will claim that interest is due on that actual cash sum for the period between the payments?

Mr. Stewart: That is correct. There will be no additional financial burden on a local authority as a result of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East asked me a number of detailed questions about the Scottish provisions. In answer to his first question, he was right to say that they relate only to local plans and simplified planning zones or inquiries in Scotland. That is because, in Scotland, examinations in public into structure plan proposals are carried out on behalf of the Secretary of State—who therefore pays the whole cost—and not on behalf of local authorities. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that there have been no inquiries in Scotland in relation to simplified planning zones.

On the hon. Gentleman's third question, the matter has not been tested in the courts in Scotland. He asked what would happen if it were tested before the Bill becomes law. I cannot anticipate the result of any court action, but I can reassure him, I hope, by saying that I do not believe that any local authority is anticipating taking court action—for the obvious reason that the Bill will make the position very clear in the reasonably near future.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about outstanding accounts. In Scotland, the total is £104,000. He asked me about the local authorities involved, which are West Lothian, Kilmarnock and Loudoun, Perth and Kinross and Moray.

I hope that in replying to this short debate I have been able to reassure the House on the perfectly legitimate points that have been raised. I hope that there will not be a bare-knuckle fight in Committee and thereafter on this Bill. Instead, I hope that we can look forward to a constructive discussion of what I believe the House generally has agreed is a necessary Bill. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (COSTS OF INQUIRIES ETC.) BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Town and Country Planning (Costs of Inquiries etc.) Bill it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any administrative expenses incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of the Act; and

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act; and

(b) the making of payments into the Consolidated Fund.— *[Mr. Burns.]*

Question agreed to.

Child Care Facilities (House of Commons)

[Relevant documents: Part of the Minutes of Proceedings of the Administration Committee on 1 March and 26 April 1994 (Extracts from House of Commons Paper No. 374 of Session 1993–94) and the Report on potential demand for child care facilities published by the House of Commons Commission.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

6.4 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The purpose of this debate, which the Leader of the House has arranged at the request of the House of Commons Commission, is to sound out the views of hon. Members on child care provision for hon. Members, their staff and staff of the House. I hope that it will be helpful if I briefly set out the background to what has been a long-running issue, describe the options for a child care policy, and then leave it to other hon. Members to express their views.

Under the system introduced following the Ibbs report, the usual way in which new or extended services are provided to the House is for the relevant domestic Committee to make a recommendation. The Finance and Services Committee and the Commission then consider the merits and costs of the proposal. As I said during oral questions on 24 October, that route has not been followed in this case because the relevant Committee—the Administration Committee—did not agree to support the provision of such a service.

That decision occurred after the Committee had supervised a survey of demand at the request of the Commission. The survey, by RSL Ltd., has now been made available to the House on our authority and it provides some useful material for this debate. I shall discuss the results of the survey in a moment, but first I want to identify the different groups of people whom we need to consider in forming any policy on child care provision.

I should say here that the Chairman of the Administration Committee, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin), intended to take part in this debate, but has been prevented from doing so because he has had to return to Scotland for the funeral of a close relative.

Under the 1978 Act, the Commission is the employer of House staff, currently some 1,300 in number. The Commission's financial responsibilities in employment matters are limited to the provision of facilities for that group of people. However, it is well aware that the issue of child care is of equal concern to hon. Members and the staff whom they employ—of whom some 1,600 are now paid by the Fees Office. A significant number of Members' staff work not here, but in the constituencies. Although the financial implications of providing any child care service for Members and their staff are not the direct responsibility of the Commission, we feel that it would be better to have an agreed general policy that would include them.

I come now to the options for a child care policy and to the survey of demand. There are three main options—an in-house nursery established on the parliamentary estate or nearby and run by the House itself or on its behalf; the provision of places in an outside nursery, probably run as a joint venture with another body; or direct financial assistance to parents to help them in providing their own child care. The third option, using child care vouchers, is already used in the other place, as well as in the National Audit Office and many other organisations.

The first option of an in-house nursery was the main basis for the original planning in the late 1980s. However, the former Services Committee soon encountered a major difficulty. The Accommodation and Works Committee advised that no space on the parliamentary estate would be available for any nursery until after the completion of the phase 2 building, which is now envisaged for 1999. In theory, existing space could be reallocated, but the location provided would need to be suitable, with sufficient play space, toilets and other accommodation.

The Commission's view is that we must meet the standards which other nursery providers are required by statute to meet, and those are fairly exacting. Those difficulties led the Services Committee and its successor, the Administration Committee, to investigate a second option—that of taking some places in a nursery set up in conjunction with Whitehall Departments. One particular scheme was identified in Vincent square, but was turned down by the Administration Committee last year as inappropriate because of the lack of flexibility—only six places were initially available—despite a considerable requirement of capital and running costs.

I come now to the third option of child care vouchers. Such a scheme would provide a subsidy towards the cost of child care arranged by the parents. The House of Lords uses such a scheme for its staff, although it is not available to Peers and I do not know what the demand would be if it were. As I made clear at the outset, the House of Commons Commission has direct responsibility only for staff of the House. Therefore, if this option were to be chosen, whether it was extended to Members and their staff would depend on whether the House resolved that there should be additional funding for that purpose or whether, in the absence of additional funding, Members were willing to devote part of their existing office costs allowances to providing child care vouchers for their staff. They are, of course, free to do that now, although I recognise that some hon. Members, like me, are finding some difficulty in meeting their existing office costs obligations out of their allowances.

I should add that a claim for a voucher scheme has now been made by the trade unions representing House of Commons staff. In the other place, eligible staff receive a voucher worth £6 per day worked, per family, and the Commons unions are seeking similar treatment. Unlike workplace nursery places, the subsidy is a taxable benefit and it would be worth about £4.50 after tax to most staff. I have moved several amendments to Finance Bills in Committee on behalf of my party to try to widen the tax relief so that it would extend to vouchers and to other forms of child care, but we have not been successful so far.

Those are the three options on which a survey of potential demand was carried out early this year. Questionnaires were sent to 4,220 people, including hon. Members, their staff, staff of the House and others. There was a 28 per cent. response rate, which is not unusual for such studies. The findings show no clear-cut preference

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

between an in-house facility and people making their own child care arrangements using vouchers, although the former was marginally preferred.

The Commission has already made known its view in terms of its responsibility to House staff. It has said that, if a viable scheme for child care help can be devised, it would want it to go ahead. As a good employer, the Commission is aware of the arguments for assistance with child care. I know that many House staff make intricate and often expensive arrangements to have their children cared for, as was shown in evidence taken by the Select Committee on Employment in June 1994, where a number of hon. Members and House staff from various Departments gave detailed and clear evidence about the arrangements that they had to make. Any scheme would undoubtedly help in the recruitment and retention of staff. No less important, the introduction of a child care scheme would also firmly underline the House's commitment to a policy of equal opportunity.

In deciding its policy, the Commission needs to take account of the practical possibilities and the cost. An in-house nursery, assuming that we could find suitable space for it in the near future, would be expensive both to the House and to parents, and might not provide value for money. For example, if parents received a 50 per cent. subsidy, in line with civil service practice, parental contributions could still be as high as £75 per child per week. A joint venture scheme would involve similar costs per child. It would also be hard to predict the number of places needed. Finding a suitable location will undoubtedly be a problem, as the Commission's discussions with the relevant Committee have illustrated.

There are other drawbacks to an in-house or joint venture scheme. Opening hours would have to be either very long, adding to the cost, or unsuitable for parents who work late hours. In some cases, young children would have to be brought to Westminster by public transport in the rush hour. The demand in recesses would be difficult to predict. On-site facilities, however, would benefit some staff and could be opened to other groups who work in the building and are covered by the survey, such as the police, postal staff and press. There is also value in the House setting an example to employers in the provision of a workplace nursery. We might, however, be able to help more people at lower cost through a voucher scheme, which could also cover hon. Members' staff who work in the constituencies. We have received representations on that point.

The Commission wishes the matter to be resolved as it has been under discussion for an unreasonably long time. We look to hon. Members for their views on whether a workplace nursery or a voucher system is preferable, on whether vouchers represent an interim solution until the provision of on-site facilities, and on any other consideration that we should bear in mind before reaching a decision.

6.12 pm

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): This debate on the provision of child care in the House of Commons and on the provision of such a facility generally has both a symbolic and practical importance. By the mid-1980s, 24 per cent. of women with children under the age of five were working; by 1991, however, 45 per cent. of such women were at work. There is a national child care gap of 400,000 places.

As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, the House of Commons should set an example. Both business and industry increasingly recognise the need for child care provision and its importance to working mothers and fathers—and I stress fathers. I was speaking earlier to a Conservative Member who said that he would have liked to be here for the debate but that he was looking after his little boy and there was no child care provision. Obviously, therefore, some hon. Members need such provision and they are not necessarily women.

Fifteen years ago, long before I came to this House, I raised the issue with an hon. Member and was told that the House of Commons did not need child care facilities because there were not many women Members. He said that most of them were past child-bearing age, so the problem did not exist. I pointed out there and then that hundreds of women worked in the House of Commons as researchers, secretaries, librarians, catering workers, cleaning staff and ancillary workers. He looked very surprised. It is all too easy for hon. Members to think that they are the only people here who have needs. We are talking about many people who make the operation of this Chamber possible.

The Labour party is taking positive steps to encourage more women to come to this place and I understand that the Conservative party has a target of 50 per cent. women candidates for the next election. It is in the interests of the political parties and of democracy that we have more women Members of Parliament.

I and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) are the joint chairs of the parliamentary Labour party women's group. Since April 1992, it has considered child care and the attitude to children in the House and it has found some interesting facts. First, there is a family room in the House. When we asked whether it was possible for children to use the family room, we were told that it was for the wives of hon. Members and that children would disturb them.

Secondly, we found that there was a rifle range. I found it extraordinary that it was acceptable for the House to have a rifle range but not a creche. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who was the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson on women's issues, visited the rifle range and met the officers of the rifle club, who were somewhat alarmed at our asking to see it as they suspected that we were on our child care campaign. They assured us that one woman hon. Member was a member of the rifle club and they were a bit put out when we rightly guessed who it was—the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie). We pointed out to the officers that we were not trying to stop their fun but trying to make the point that if it was all right to find room for people to take potshots at targets it should also be all right to find room for children.

My hon. Friends the Members for Peckham (Ms Harman) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) once tried to arrange for their children to visit them during a half-term holiday. They were told that they could not provide their own food and would have to pay for food that was provided. They were also told that there would be a charge for the room. Just trying to arrange to see their own children was a great effort.

I understand that, since 1989, Government Departments have been able to use existing budgets to subsidise child care. That is important in the House, where many staff are paid considerably less than hon. Members. We should think about the way in which costs would impact on people on lower pay. In 1992, I and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) visited the Ministry of Defence creche. In the culture of the MOD, many military people in their working life rarely have much contact with children. The fact that the MOD has a creche is to its credit. It is interesting to see buggies and wellington boots in the MOD foyer. If a creche can be provided in the MOD, I do not understand why it is impossible for us to have such a facility here. Clearly, the MOD venture is an unqualified success. Parliament should follow that example.

I believe that the report, which has been quoted extensively, shows that a majority support an in-house facility rather than vouchers. Having spoken to people in the House who have parental responsibilities, I suspect that an in-house facility is what they would most prefer. The Parliamentary Nursery Campaign Committee issued a statement today. Its press officer said that the survey showed that there was a clear demand from hon. Members and their staff and House of Commons workers. As has been said, the survey was carried out by an independent research company. The press officer said:

"A day nursery would be of considerable benefit to mothers and fathers who work in the mother of Parliaments. It would alleviate the isolation of children from their parents who work long hours. But it would also be in the public interest. A day nursery would help to reduce staff absenteeism and unnecessary staff turnover and consequent loss of expertise and experience. Given the growing demand on Members of Parliament this should help to improve their ability to represent the interests of their constituents".

We have come a long way since 30 October 1979 when Mr. Patrick Jenkin, then a Secretary of State, said on the "Man Alive" programme on BBC television:

"If the good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work, He wouldn't have created man and woman."

I am pleased to say that such statements are not heard so often now.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): They are heard on the Conservative side of the House.

Ms Corston: Perhaps the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South should set up a women's group, as we have.

Mrs. Currie: We have tried.

Ms Corston: I suppose it might not get many members.

I commend the House of Commons Commission for carrying out the survey and I pay tribute to hon. Members who have served on the Committee in the past and have made the survey a reality. I hope that we shall have an in-house creche of which we can be proud well before the next general election so that the increasing numbers of women who come here will know that the job is commensurate with a family life and so that women outside this place will be encouraged to think about a parliamentary career because they will see that they will not have to abandon their children.

6.21 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I wish to caution the House against the suggestion being mooted that we should set up a creche within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. I am surprised that we are having this brief debate at all, bearing in mind that the Accommodation Committee has addressed this problem on four occasions. On each occasion it reached the decision that there should not be a creche within the Palace of Westminster. What is the time of the Accommodation Committee used for if its decisions are overridden, or attempted to be overridden, again and again by the House?

There are at least five reasons why I agree wholeheartedly with the Accommodation Committee's decisions. I have been in the House for a very long time and, over the years, I have learnt that room here is at a premium. For many years I had only a tiny office, and many hon. Members still have very poor accommodation. We should recognise that, even when the new building in Bridge street is finished, we shall still be in the same position, with enormous competition for the available room.

Our work load gets inexorably heavier and most hon. Members need much more space than ever before for their filing cabinets, computers and papers. When I first came to the House, only a few of us had an office at all. Many of us used to work at a desk in one of the Lobbies. Some hon. Members will remember those days. Now we have more burdens than we had then and we could not possibly manage with a desk in a corridor. Many of us still share rooms which are far too small. It is extraordinary to suggest that there is some wide open space that could be used for a creche or creches—that is what we will need.

Mrs. Currie: The same arguments were used about the establishment of the House of Commons gymnasium. It now has 600 members, including 60 hon. Members. It is an extremely useful and invaluable service for the entire community that works here. Is my hon. Friend recommending that it should be shut because we do not have enough space?

Dame Jill Knight: Of course not. What a stupid suggestion. There is a great deal of difference between the need of hon. Members who work long hours in this place to have exercise, and the extra-curricular activity of bringing in all their children. It is a totally different matter.

In spite of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), I shall develop my argument and point out that this is not only an issue for Members of Parliament. Library staff are constantly asking for more space, which they need, as do our secretaries and many other staff here. We do not have enough room for good working conditions now, and it is useless for my hon. Friend to suggest that we have so much room that space can be made available for many other purposes. I do not know where an extra room for a creche or creches would come from.

I love children, but I do not think that their place is here. We are talking not about older children but about babies and toddlers who would need many nurses and minders. Their presence here would be noisy, costly and continuous. Hon. Members must understand that we could not close the creche for the summer or Easter holidays. If we opened a creche, it would have to be open all the time that children need to be cared for.

[Dame Jill Knight]

The number of children who would have to be catered for would be far bigger than anyone has so far recognised. We are talking not only about the children of hon. Members. I am happy to see far more women Members than we have ever had before—

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Rubbish.

Dame Jill Knight: Well, there have never been as many women in the House as there are today. That is a good thing, and I hope that there will be more.

We are talking about the children of secretaries, Library staff, attendants, cleaners, kitchen staff and Post Office staff. There are many other offices, such as the Rediffusion office, the cook's office and many more. This morning I took the precaution of finding out how many female staff work in this place.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): The hon. Lady mentioned the large number of staff, other than hon. Members, who work in the House and might wish to make use of this facility. Does she accept that many of those staff work during the recesses as well?

Dame Jill Knight: That is exactly my point. The hon. Lady must understand that the recesses are used for intensive work in the Palace of Westminster. It would not be possible to close a creche during the summer months, so when would there be an opportunity to carry out all the necessary building work and refurbishment? To judge from what she said, the hon. Lady seems to recognise that, once open, a creche could not be closed simply because the House was not sitting.

Does the hon. Lady wish to come back on that point? Does she contest it? We are talking not about a creche for the days, weeks and months when the House sits, but about a permanent creche all year round.

Ms Anderson: I agree that we are talking about a permanent facility. My point was that there would be no need to close it during the recess, because plenty of people would still be using it. I do not see why a creche would have to be closed in order for building and refurbishment to be carried out in the rest of the Palace.

Dame Jill Knight: With the greatest respect, the hon. Lady has not been here very long, and probably has no idea how much work is done during the recess. I am making a perfectly relevant point.

Ms Anderson: The hon. Lady said that I am relatively inexperienced in respect of the House. She may not be aware that I worked in the House for almost 20 years as a secretary before I became a Member of Parliament, and therefore have a great deal of experience of its workings.

Dame Jill Knight: There is all the difference in the world between working as a secretary and working as a Member of Parliament.

Mrs. Currie: There is not a scrap of difference.

Dame Jill Knight: If my hon. Friend thinks that there is not a scrap of difference, why is she not a secretary rather than a Member of Parliament?

Mrs. Currie: Without my staff, who are absolutely marvellous and work very long hours, I could not be a Member of Parliament.

Dame Jill Knight: There have been times when my hon. Friend has wished to be a Member of another Parliament; perhaps she will eventually leave us to attain that goal.

My point, which I am sure that many hon. Members understand, is that we are talking not about a short-term facility which is open only when the House sits. We are talking about an extension of the House that would have to be available the whole year round.

I took the precaution of finding out how many female members of staff would be eligible to use creche facilities. I found that there are 1,395. Even if only half of them—it might be more, but I was unable to find out the exact number this morning—are of child-bearing age, there could be nearly 1,000 children to be cared for.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: I will always give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The hon. Lady has been extremely generous in giving way, and I apologise to her. As she knows, I have been here a long time. It has always struck me that, when the House wants to find accommodation, it will hire suitable buildings and go to considerable expense, as it has at Millbank and elsewhere, in order to provide suitable accommodation. The provision of a creche is long overdue, but it could be done. We face the hazard of wasting the assets of many women here because we do not provide something—the right to a creche for their children—that is regarded as absolutely elementary in most industrial units. We are being wasteful and fairly short-sighted.

Dame Jill Knight: In all fairness, if those women had not found it possible to make arrangements for their children, they would not be working here.

The House should carefully consider the number of children eligible for a place in a creche here. We should remember that we could have 1,000 children, babies and toddlers in this place.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): It would be pandemonium.

Dame Jill Knight: My hon. Friend said that it would be pandemonium, and he is probably absolutely right.

Dr. Lynne Jones(Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: This is the last time.

Dr. Jones: I take the hon. Lady's point that there might be a large number of children involved, but surely the purpose of having an independently conducted survey was to establish the demand. There is a demand, and it is one for which we should be able to cater.

Dame Jill Knight: I remind the hon. Lady that the Accommodation Committee, which knows far more about

the matter than people outside, has examined the position at least three or four times, and decided that it will not back the idea of a creche in this place.

We are not talking only about the children of women Members of Parliament. We must recognise that there is such a thing as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and there is no reason why male Members of Parliament could not claim to use the creche, which could mean 2,000 or more children here. I am making a serious point, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) should not regard it as funny. Coping with 1,000 or 1,500 children in this place is a more serious matter—

Mrs. Currie *rose—*

Dame Jill Knight: I am not giving way, even to my hon. Friend. I am making a serious point—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I do not allow private conversations. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) has the Floor, and if she does not want to allow interventions, other hon. Members must keep quiet.

Dame Jill Knight: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am cautioning the House—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. My comment applies to all parties, including Front Benchers.

Dame Jill Knight: It is not a question of accommodating only a handful of children. We would be committed to making places available for about 1,500 toddlers and babies, which is a very serious matter.

I am also worried about the cost. It is all very well to say that we have made money available for this and that, but we must remember that it is taxpayers' money. People outside are paying for the things that we demand.

Mrs. Currie: This is a taxable benefit.

Dame Jill Knight: My hon. Friend says that we can tax but, whether or not people are taxed, the cost of providing facilities for so many children would be very great. First, there would be the of renting a prime site in the most prestigious area of the city of London. The creche or creches would have to be kept in excellent decorative order. I can just imagine the scandal if the media were to discover a crack in a wall or that the paint was not in good condition.

There would have to be an enormous amount of equipment such as sand pits, chairs, tables, potties, paddling pools, climbing frames, swings, seesaws, paints, toys, picture books and wendy houses. [*Laughter.*] The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) may think that that is funny. Perhaps she has not had the advantage of having children, as I have had. I know what it costs to have children catered for.

Dr. Jones: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: I was not referring to the hon. Lady.

Dr. Jones: I should like to answer that point.

Dame Jill Knight: I said that I would not give way again, and I meant it.

The facilities that would have to be made available here are not cheap. Facilities would also have to be made available for cooking food and for serving it. There would have to be beds, cots, high chairs and staff.

I do not know whether any of the hon. Members who have backed this proposition have made the slightest effort to work out the cost. I reckon that it is only fair, when we are spending taxpayers' money, to consider carefully the cost we are imposing. One thing for sure is that employees in this place would demand subsidised child care and would be neither able nor willing to pay the extremely high cost that would be demanded for it.

There are plenty of ways in which children can be cared for when one is a working mother. I strongly believe in systems whereby women who need to work, perhaps because they are lone parents, are given every help in having their children cared for in a nursery—but not in the House.

6.41 pm

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I understand that we have had discussion, debate and campaigning on child care facilities in the House for about 25 years. In that time, there have been many good intentions, as well as quite a lot of opposition. I had not expected to see quite so much opposition today. A number of surveys and studies have been commissioned on how we might move forward on the issue. As far as I can see, in those 25 years we have hardly moved a step forward.

I had hoped that there would be consensus across the House on the issue. The past year has been the United Nations Year of the Family. There has been much discussion about how we can help and support families. There has been much cross-party consensus that good child care is part of that support, so I am especially disappointed to have heard comments today that seem to hark back to the old way of thinking—that we do not need to support families through child care.

We are talking about recreation facilities. I find that being able to be with my family is a bit of recreation, as other people go to the gym for recreation; it is not somewhere I go for recreation. Listening to the debate, I am reminded of the time some years ago when I was a councillor. I was branded as being of the loony left because I thought that it was important to have child care facilities, or at least to discuss them. Memories of that time came back to me today.

I hope that some of my points will answer criticisms made today. Child care is important for women to be able to fulfil their potential. It is important to families, and it is important that men and women are able to share in the responsibilities of looking after children. Outside this place, there is an increasing awareness among British companies that child care provision is good for business as well. Companies have realised that it is in their interests to keep their women employees once they have had children and to hold on to the skills of those employees.

A couple of years ago, the Institute of Personnel Management studied a company with about 2,000 employees. It discovered that it was giving away about £500,000 a year without even realising it. It was losing about 50 women a year who were leaving the company—solely, probably, because they were not getting child care at work. It was a problem. Further calculations showed the company that that was costing it about £10,000 a head. The position is not quite the same in the House.

There are various estimates of how many people work in the House. If we use the figure of 3,000, that makes the House a fair-sized business. It is not unreasonable to

[Mrs. Diana Maddock]

assume that we have here a similar loss of trained and experienced women who leave when they have children. There are women who work for Members of Parliament, in the Library service, in catering, in finance and in other parts of the House, who have valuable skills.

I know just how skilled many people here are. This week—the people involved were men—I have had to deal with the Public Bill Office. We could lose just as much as any company in the loss of women who work here. There is no doubt that it makes economic sense for us to provide child care assistance for people working in the House. I have not done the sums, but I cannot imagine that this place is so different from other businesses.

When I arrived here, I was somewhat surprised to find a gym and a shooting range, but no nursery or creche. To a certain extent, we have got our priorities wrong. I know that space is at a premium. We have heard a great deal again today about just what a premium it is. I know that things have improved, but I also realise that we all work in difficult conditions. There are four people in my office, and I am sure that that is true for other people here. More offices are being built and planned. Surely we should at least be planning space for creches and nurseries in those buildings.

We have a family room, which has also been mentioned this evening. I have not had the opportunity to use it, but I have been to have a look at it. I understand that children are allowed to use it at the moment. I am not sure whether, if there was a health and safety check on it, it would be considered absolutely suitable.

There are some sofas and a number of small tables which have extremely sharp corners. There are some books and one or two toys, which are not complete. There is a small room where the children can wash and perhaps hang clothes, but there is no lavatory and there is no nappy-changing facility. Perhaps we could start with some nappy-changing facilities, a playpen for small children and some more suitable games and toys, not only for young children, but for older children who are here as well.

Mrs. Currie: When I arrived in the House 12 years ago, there was no family room. I for one am very grateful that we got it. It is, however, worth pointing out to the hon. Lady that it is available only for Members of Parliament; members of staff cannot use it.

Mrs. Maddock: I am grateful for that intervention. I understand that point. However, we could improve the family room facilities fairly quickly.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): While the hon. Lady is busy sneering at the toys and other facilities available in the family room, she might bear in mind that it was the families of Members of Parliament who organised it, got it together and provided it. She might bear that in mind when she is so contemptuous.

Mrs. Maddock: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman thought that I was sneering; I was not. I was merely pointing out that I would like to see better facilities there. Perhaps we could help the people who have provided the family room to get facilities rather better than those at present. We have had quite a lot of surveys in the House. Perhaps we should ask people what else they would like to see in the family room.

The latest survey published in the long saga of trying to do something about child care facilities shows that more people would prefer to have in-house facilities than a child care voucher scheme. Despite that, because of the long history of inaction, we should do two things. We should try to set up a child care voucher scheme, such as the one operating in the other place, and we should allocate some space in our future plans for a nursery or creche on site. A lot of building is going on, especially around Westminster tube station, and we should do everything we can to say, "Here is the space; we will use it."

Vouchers are often a better option for many people, because they provide a bit more flexibility. I have a personal view about the best way in which to look after young children. I spent some time living in Sweden many years ago, where I was very conscious of the fact that children could become institutionalised from an early age. The provision of child care vouchers gives people the opportunity to have their children looked after in a family-type environment.

The scheme operating in the other place has been reasonably successful. I say to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) that in fact an enormous number of people have not been rushing to take up the vouchers. I tried to get the most recent figures. There are about 310 staff in the other place, and so far 17 have taken up the voucher scheme. If there are between four and five times that number of staff here, to start with, perhaps 100 people would try to take up the child care voucher scheme. Obviously, as Liberal Democrats, we would like the scheme to be even better value for money and child care vouchers to be tax free, but that is not part of the debate today.

Labour Members have talked about what their party was doing to get women into Parliament. I think that all the parties have discussed that with their women members. We certainly have. We discovered that one of the reasons why women found difficulty in becoming a Member of Parliament or even in getting involved in politics was that often they were the carers, not only of children but of older people. We are obviously discussing an important point if we are serious about wanting more hon. Members in the House.

Dame Jill Knight: I am following what the hon. Lady is saying. Is she saying that we want not only a creche but some facilities for older people as well?

Mrs. Maddock: When I made the point about older children, I was talking about our family room.

Dame Jill Knight: Just a moment ago, the hon. Lady mentioned that women looked after young people and were carers for elderly people as well. I am trying to get clear what she is asking for.

Mrs. Maddock: Sorry: it did not occur to me that the hon. Lady was referring to that. I was merely pointing out that women care for other people too, but it is irrelevant to the argument today.

Providing child care facilities for employees of the House is very important. It is important that we set an example to other people by being good employers. However, many people outside the House are ahead of the game. Even if we do not think that the provision of child care facilities is a good idea, when considering it from a

purely self-interested economic point of view, it would be worth our while. That has been proved by studies in the business world. We are a business here, whether we like it or not.

We have procrastinated for far too long. I hope that, after today's debate, we will take some action, rather than having to come back again in another year to ask if we have conducted another survey and what we are to do about it. It is time we did something, and took some action.

6.52 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): In this debate, we should differentiate clearly between the idea of an in-house creche and that of providing vouchers. What seems to have been debated tonight is the provision of an in-house creche, which, in my view, would be mere feminist tokenism. I have listened carefully to the hon. Members for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) and for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson). All of them are talking about the wonderful tokenism. Is it really sensible to expect women to drag very young children and infants across London, through the rush hour, to central London to a creche or child care facility here? It is wildly inappropriate to think of any such thing.

Then, take that argument—

Ms Corston: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Arnold: No, not for the moment. Take that argument a little further and listen to what the hon. Member for Christchurch said about the creches that she saw in Sweden and her concerns about institutionalisation of the children concerned. I know that it is not the Liberal Democrats' practice to carry forward their own logic. They did not with the carbon tax as they then opposed VAT on fuel. I ask the hon. Lady to take forward her logic. The place to bring up young people, especially infants, is in the home with their mothers.

Mrs. Maddock: If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully, he would have heard me propose two things—that we had a creche here and that we provided child care vouchers. It was precisely because I agreed with many of the points that the hon. Gentleman has made that I was talking of my experience in Sweden. Providing both gives the parent a choice. Parents can decide where they want their child to be and what is most convenient for them.

Mr. Arnold: The hon. Lady outlined the disadvantages of bringing up very young children throughout the day in creches. So, let us not be under any illusion. Let us consider where that creche would be in Westminster. Let us look at our facilities. Mention was made of the rifle range. I wonder whether hon. Members have been down to the rifle range and seen it in the cellars of this place without natural light. Should youngsters be brought up in such Dickensian surroundings without natural light? That is a fatuous suggestion.

Let us look further into the proposal to consider whether the facilities would be provided in the outbuildings or even outside the parliamentary estate. Committees of the House considered precisely that and came up with a cost liability of £234,000 to the taxpayer if we were to advance down that line. That was for only six children—admittedly, over a five-year period. Hon. Ladies on the Opposition Benches are talking not about children, but about many hundreds of children. Have they begun to address not only the impact on the development of the children concerned, but the cost to the British taxpayer of their proposals?

One of the hon. Ladies on the Opposition Benches said that she had been a councillor and had been involved in such matters. I should have thought that the hon. Ladies coming here from the weird and wonderful Labour councils would have looked at some of the weird and wonderful projects that they had carried out at vast expense to the council tax payer. The talk of an in-house creche in this ancient building in Westminster has more to do with posturing and posing for photo opportunities than much else. I can think only of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), who seems to have made that kind of photo opportunity into an art form.

Ms Corston: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Ministry of Defence creche in Northumberland avenue is extremely successful and well supported? Clearly, staff in the Ministry of Defence—both men and women—feel that it is perfectly possible to take their children to that creche without it creating any problem whatever. Is he also aware that although nobody has ever suggested that the rifle range be turned into a creche, that range is surely symbolic of the priorities of the House of Commons?

Mr. Arnold: The hon. Lady refers to a creche in the Ministry of Defence. If I believed that some of the hon. Ladies of the Labour party would submit their children to the proper, disciplined instruction that is to be found in the armed services, I might even favour the idea. But that is not what they are suggesting. They would bring in their weird and wonderful approach to child rearing, with all its disastrous consequences.

What about the demand for child care? We should look at it properly. Indeed, it was looked at properly. The Administration Committee and the House of Commons Commission commissioned a report to go into that matter, and we have been able to consider that report in quite some detail tonight. Incidentally, what was the expense of that report? I asked the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—who, as a leading member of the Liberal Democrats, believes in open government—the cost of that report. His answer was that it was confidential and that he could not give that information to an hon. Member in this House. I must say that, when it comes to cost, there seems to be an extraordinary approach to matters such as the one before us.

What did that report show? If the cost to parents were £150 per week, out of all the Members of Parliament, Members' staff and staff of the House, 38 only would take up the use of such provision and only 18 of them would do so immediately. Even if the price were only £75 a week to those people, the take-up would be 69 only.

The matter has been considered very carefully by the Administration Committee under the genial chairmanship of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin). It is no coincidence that, after many years of consideration of the matter, the Committee turned down the proposal not once, but twice. It was turned down unanimously by the Labour members of the Committee and by the lady members of that Committee. They turned down the proposal because they looked into the matter,

[Mr. Arnold]

used their judgment and then decided against it. The House should accept the judgment of that Committee and of those hon. Ladies and hon. Gentlemen.

Mr. Beith: I explained earlier that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) is attending a funeral in Scotland today. He would want me to point out that he moved a motion from the Chair, which was defeated by the Committee. As Chairman, he did not cast a vote on either of the occasions to which the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) referred.

Mr. Arnold: Therefore, we cannot know the hon. Gentleman's view of the matter. However, that does not alter the fact that no members of the Committee were in favour of the proposal. That point is worth bearing in mind.

The answer to the question whether we should give Members of Parliament vouchers for child care is a categorical no. The public already think that we are gravy-train merchants. If hon. Members had such vouchers, the public would think that we were once again helping ourselves.

It has been asked whether vouchers should be provided to the staff of Members of Parliament. They can already be provided as part of the office allowance, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said. I wonder how many hon. Ladies on the Opposition Benches can stand up, put their allowances where their mouths are, and say that they have already made that provision for their staff.

With regard to the staff of the Palace of Westminster, in respect of their other pursuits and duties in this place, there is plenty of merit in a child care voucher system. However, that should be considered within the global employment package of the staff concerned. We should consider who are the most relevant and who are the least relevant. Any enlightened employer would make that consideration.

We should be under no illusions: with widespread eligibility, many hundreds and possibly thousands—as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) said—would apply for vouchers. As usual, the poor infantryman—the taxpayer—would have to pick up the bill for the wild enthusiasms of the feminists in this place.

7.2 pm

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I thank the Leader of the House for finding time for this debate. It has been long awaited and very gratefully received. It is about time that the issues were aired.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). Although I did not agree with a word she said, I admired her courage and honesty. I sit on the Accommodation and Works Committee with her—at least, I have had that pleasure for the past year or so; the membership keeps changing and I am not sure whether she is still a member of that Committee. At least she is honest and open enough to come to the Chamber to tell us what persuaded her to support the decision of that Committee. I point out to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that the decision was not taken unanimously. However, at least the hon. Member for Edgbaston expressed the honesty of her convictions.

The House sometimes surprises us. Sometimes its generosity catches one's breath, but sometimes its meanness does the same. This is one of the latter occasions. When we discuss this issue, hon. Members may say in self-defence, "Well, I have survived for 20 years in this place, so I don't see that it's necessary." That view may be a reflection of the fact that there are so few women in this place.

One can recount all sorts of reasons why the provision is unnecessary. However, I simply cannot understand why so many bars, a shooting range, a gentleman's hairdresser or a gym are necessary, but child care provision for the children of the staff—and for Members' children, if we wish—is not.

In response to the questionnaire, only 12 per cent. of hon. Members—52—showed an interest in the proposal. Hon. Members are not pressing for the proposal. They do not seem to be anxious about it. There is not a majority in favour of it. However, the staff have expressed a very serious interest in the proposal.

It is not simply a question of, "I want". More than 200 members of staff who replied to the questionnaire said that they were willing to contribute up to £50 a week for child care. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said that they would not be so keen to contribute if they had to pay £150. He should wander along the Corridor into the Tea Room and have a nice intimate talk with the Tea Room staff. He should find out how much money—

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mudie: No, I will not give way. Many hon. Members wish to participate and the debate has a fixed time limit.

The hon. Member for Gravesham should find out how much those dedicated staff earn. That is the approach that we should take. We are not talking about a perk for Members. Members of Parliament are not pressing for it. The proposal should be the response of an enlightened modern employer.

From the moment hon. Members walk through the front door of this building, we are cosseted by first-class staff—the catering staff, the messengers, the cleaning staff and the Library staff. Wherever we go, we receive first-class treatment from the staff. However, we never step back and see them as individuals raising families, with all the problems that children create. So long as they are there and at our beck and call, fine; we do not care what they are paid and we do not care about their problems. That is what it is all about.

More than 800 members of staff responded to the questionnaire and said that they were interested in the proposal as they had a need. What is so offensive about the Administration Committee's report is that it was aware of those details, but the Committee voted four-nil to pay no attention to that request.

While all that was happening, the hon. Member for Gravesham may be aware that the Government sent out a document entitled, "The Best of Both Worlds". The views in that document are not those of loony left councils. The Government made space in that publication to say what Leicester county council is doing in respect of day care

nurseries. The document referred to the experience of the Midland bank and American Express, and said that there should be more of it and that that was best practice. However, when it comes to the staff of this building, we do not care. They are here simply for our convenience.

Mrs. Currie: I wish to associate myself with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the excellent staff in this place. I invite him to ponder the fact that almost the first action of the new Republican House of Representatives in the United States was to decide to remove from itself all the special privileges that exempted it from employment laws in the rest of the country. In doing that, it asserted that it was a normal place of employment.

Mr. Mudie: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention as it gave me time to calm down. I would urge the approach described by the hon. Lady on the Leader of the House and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed ended by asking us for our views. He wanted to know what we thought should be done. The first thing that the Commission should do is to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and his colleagues that one priority is not enough when one is doing a job: more than one priority can be handled. It is not good enough for the Accommodation and Works Committee to say that its priority is that every hon. Member should have an office to himself or herself and, until that is settled, it will not do anything else.

The sting is in the tail if we listen closely to the hon. Member for Edgbaston. The Accommodation and Works Committee's priority takes us to the end of the century. Once that objective is reached, we know what will happen. Members' allowances will mean that there will be more staff in the House. It is no longer sufficient to have one secretary's desk; one needs one or, possibly, two researchers' desks as well.

The dinosaurs in this building always have an excuse. It would be better, if the dinosaurs will not give way, to consider the capital works programme on the Floor of the House. All the money is not being spent on Members and their secretaries—far from it. Some very interesting money is being spent. I shall spare some blushes in the Chamber and in the building by not going into detail. Details would be—*[Interruption.]* I shall give one example.

Why do we intend to spend a vast amount of public money moving the gentlemen's hairdresser from one side of the corridor to the other? Have hon. Members ever seen a queue in that barber's shop? If they have, they are at the wrong end of the building. The man is feared. I have parliamentary privilege, I hope. He is feared. I shall never go to him for a haircut—I have not gone to him for a haircut. We are going to spend that money when we say that we cannot find money for a nursery. We are going to build a plush new hairdressing salon—it is not even going to be unisex; it will be a gentlemen's salon—on the other side of the corridor.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Is that in the building programme?

Mr. Mudie: Yes, it is in the building programme.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed should look quietly at the building programme. He will find, as I have found, that there is sufficient brass in the budget to build more than one day nursery. I should like the right hon. Gentleman also to tell the Accommodation and Works Committee that it is not good enough to wait until the end of the century for the new building to be completed.

We want, either in the parliamentary estate or reasonably close to the building, suitable day care facilities such as those which we are urging private employers to provide. We should end the intolerable situation in which a girl in our Tea Room receives no child care vouchers, whereas a girl along the corridor in the other House receives child care vouchers. It is intolerable that staff in the Palace should be treated differently. The hon. Member for Edgbaston fears that 2,000 people will come out of the woodwork and demand such facilities. Child care vouchers would meet that demand without the need to find another building.

As a modern employer approaching the 21st century, we need day care facilities on the premises, that is, on the estate or nearby. If that would take more than 18 months, the Commission should consider awarding vouchers to staff and Members. I would even settle for staff being awarded vouchers. If great cost were involved, the staff should have precedence. Staff should be paid child care vouchers equal to if not more than what is offered along the corridor. I would even shame the other place into raising the value of its vouchers, because the level is too low now. That would immediately assist the first-class staff who look after us. We should reciprocate.

7.13 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Time is precious. I know that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) wishes to respond to this good-natured debate. I fear that I might incur the wrath of Opposition ladies by saying what I am about to say—it might be a high-risk strategy—but I hope that what I say will be reasonable. I have just a few observations which lead me to believe that setting up a creche would be not an enlightened move, as the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) suggests, but a regressive step.

The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) said that the House should set an example. Indeed it should. It should set an example by not having a creche within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster or immediately nearby, as hon. Members have suggested. The position from which I start is not the jibe which some might level at me that a woman's place is in the home. That is not my view at all. I want as many women as possible to be active in the labour market and at work.

By and large, it should principally be up to the individual family unit to decide how to afford the care of children, what arrangements should be made and how it should be provided. In essence, behind this matter is the principle that the state should pay and that the state should subsidise women in work for the care of children. I find that philosophically objectionable, by and large, except in respect of women Members of Parliament, to whom I shall return in a moment. This matter, in effect, is a plea for a job subsidy.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Why is it so terrible for the state to subsidise families but well and fine for the state to subsidise the hon. Gentleman's house in Westminster?

Mr. Duncan: One might have expected such a comment from the hon. Member for Hackney, North and

[Mr. Duncan]

Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). I am sorry that it is not in the spirit of the debate from which she has largely been absent.

The argument about the House of Commons not having space is not significant. If space is needed, it can always be found. The point about which I feel strongly is that it would be in the wrong place. The place where one needs child care is near one's residence, not one's place of work. It would be inappropriate to have a large creche in or near the Palace of Westminster, to which mothers—or fathers—have to bring their children, perhaps across London, at very peculiar hours because of the nature of the work patterns of this place. It is far better to have child care premises close to where the mother, father or parents live.

Mrs. Currie: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Duncan: I can probably predict what the hon. Lady is going to say, but I will take the risk of giving way to her.

Mrs. Currie: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his courtesy. As both he and I passionately believe in parental choice, is not the matter of where children may be looked after a matter for the parents? Some of us would take different decisions. At the moment, the problem which faces many such parents is that there is a lack of such provision, and the proposal that we are discussing tonight would improve it.

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful for what the hon. Lady says, but I do not think that it is right—

Mrs. Currie: I am an hon. Friend.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend, yes—even now. It is inappropriate for such a body to provide those facilities, although I have no objection to individuals being given the means to find such facilities for themselves. What I principally object to is the collectivisation of child care around the place of work. It would turn us into an Orwellian body of which I do not approve.

There might be a good case for vouchers as part of a package of remuneration for those who work peculiar hours to care for their children and to assist the care of their children because they have to work peculiar hours. There is a good case for that for women Members of Parliament. The force of biology, whereby they are mothers and have the principal care of children, is a severe block on their ability to be Members of Parliament. I should like to remove as many barriers as possible to women being Members of Parliament simply because they are the ones who bear children. However, the way to do that is not to provide a central facility in or around the House of Commons or the Palace of Westminster; it is to give them, because of their peculiar circumstances, an allowance, much as hon. Members who live outside London are given one within our package of remuneration as Members of Parliament, for a second home or for travel to our constituencies.

It is the institutionalisation around the place of work for child care to which I philosophically object. It is far better for parents to be given the means and the opportunity to choose for themselves the way in which they care for their children. In the words of someone who brought up twins with no help from the state, I say to the proposal, "No, no, no."

7.19 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): When I hear the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) talk about the collectivisation of child care and the institutionalisation of work I wonder how many workplace nurseries he has visited.

It is important that we have had this debate, although Thursday evening may not have been the ideal time for it. Nevertheless, it has been a long time coming and it is good that the House has had the opportunity to debate the issue, which is important to Members of the House and even more so to the staff of the House and the staff whom Members employ. It is also right that people outside the House should see that we as Members of Parliament recognise the importance of child care provision in general.

The contributions to the debate—most of them from Opposition Members, regrettably—have been constructive in terms of the improvements in child care that not only the House of Commons, but women and men in the country as a whole, need. I have recently been appointed to the House of Commons Commission, so tonight I wanted mainly to listen to what others said. However, I shall make a few comments of my own, although after the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) I thought that other contributions might be superfluous. My hon. Friend said forcefully what many Opposition Members believe. I hope that Conservative Members realise that there are male Members of Parliament who advocate child care facilities too. It is not only what the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) abusively called the token feminists who are in favour of such improvements.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): As a male Member of Parliament, I strongly endorse what other Opposition Members have said. As the father of four children under eight, I would gladly swap one day in my life—a day of trying to look after them on a partnership basis with my wife, finding care for them and doing my job as a Member of Parliament—with any of the Conservative Members who have spoken against the proposals. If either the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) or the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) cares to take up my offer I shall meet him outside in the Lobby.

Mrs. Taylor: I have seen my hon. Friend in the morning walking through the streets of Pimlico with his young children, and a touching sight it is. I know that he takes his responsibilities seriously, and I hope that many other hon. Members do so too.

We had hoped that there would be a degree of consensus in the House about the case for making progress following the debate, but the speeches that we have heard have been a mixture of constructive suggestions from most people and staggering comments from a couple of Conservative Members, who do not seem to have taken on board any of the arguments, or the ideas, beliefs and needs that emerged clearly from the survey.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) complained that it might be noisy if children were allowed into the House of Commons, but anyone

who has sat through some of our debates must put that objection to one side. But I have one point of agreement with the hon. Lady, in that she proved that there could be a considerable demand for the facilities in question.

The hon. Member for Gravesham wanted to draw attention to the problems that women may have—he said women, but fathers could have the same difficulties—dragging young children across London to a creche. He should consider the difficulties that many people have dragging children across cities to find child care facilities simply because there are not enough of them.

Dame Jill Knight: The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) has always been immensely careful in all the jobs that she has had. Has she yet had the opportunity to make an estimate of the money that we would have to find if large numbers of parents applied for places for their children?

Mrs. Taylor: I know that the hon. Lady is concerned about such matters, and I suggest that she looks at some of the estimates in the survey that Opposition Members have mentioned. She should also consider the costs that many employers have because of absenteeism when their employees take time off work to look after their children, and because employees have to change their occupations, thereby increasing staff turnover, because there is no adequate child care provision.

When I found out that the debate was to take place I was not sure whether I should declare an interest, because I have two children, one of whom was born while I was a Member of Parliament—although, conveniently, that happened in the summer recess in 1982. For me, as a northern Member who is not based in London, child care facilities in London are not especially pertinent to what I consider to be my needs. Members who suggest that the case for a creche or other facilities has been made on the basis that more women would be attracted to becoming Members of Parliament are short sighted. Such provision might help, but it is certainly not the be all and end all for attracting more women Members. The issue is far more complex, as I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends know.

The decisions that have to be taken are important. Some hon. Members have suggested that there has been progress; others have doubted that. The family room in the House of Commons, which has existed since I entered the House in 1974, is sometimes used by children, but it is simply not suitable for young children; indeed, most of the facilities of the House are not suitable for them, as most Members realise.

The provision of child care facilities is important to Members, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East said, it is probably far more important to the staff of the House and the people whom we employ. We should do all that we can to ensure that provision is made, and made as effectively and as usefully as possible.

During business questions earlier today the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) said something in sweeping language that has been repeated by the hon. Members for Gravesham and for Rutland and Melton—that any child care facility should be near the parents' home, and that that should be the primary factor. It strikes me as strange that members of a party that claims to be the party of choice are telling people exactly what child care facilities parents should choose.

Mrs. Currie: It should be clear that there are Conservative Members, too, who feel as strongly as anyone in the House about the need to provide facilities. The figures given to us earlier about the number of women working in this place were inaccurate. It is true that 1,318 salary payments are made to female staff but there are also 596 women known to the personnel office who work for the Departments of the House. Of course there are also 62 women Members of Parliament. So we know of about 1,976, and that is a lot of women—including staff employed by Conservative Members—many of whom must have small children.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Lady probably represents a wider spectrum of opinion within the Conservative party than do the other Conservative Members whom we have heard. Her comments are valid.

Time is running short. We, as employers of our own staff, and the House of Commons Commission which arranges for the employment of people in the House, have a responsibility not just to set an example but to do our best as employers. The points that I have made about absenteeism and staff turnover are economically valid as well as important in respect of acting as good employers. The options of vouchers and direct provision need not be mutually exclusive. Given the timetable difficulties associated with the provision of a creche, more progress could possibly be made in the meantime with vouchers. What suits one family's circumstances may not suit another's—that applies as much to hon. Members as to secretaries and Library staff. It would therefore be wrong to be too restrictive about the kind of help that might be provided.

The one thing that we should all agree is that there must be some change—some movement. No hon. Member has defended the anomalies that prevail now. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East referred to the people who work in the Tea Room of the House of Commons. One of them has a young child who will be four in March. Eighteen months ago, her counterparts in the House of Lords were given child care vouchers. Had she transferred to the House of Lords then she would by now have had 18 months' worth of vouchers. It is ridiculous to treat staff in one part of the building differently from those in another. We cannot allow that to continue.

There are many aspects to this problem. Provision for very young children is required. There is also the real problem of how to provide child care after school and in the school holidays. The hon. Member for Edgbaston proved to us that there is a demand, but her conclusions were quite wrong. Throughout the country there has been a growth in the number of school care clubs and holiday care clubs. I gather than in June hon. Members will have the opportunity to see at first hand what that means. It must represent the way forward.

Figures that I have show that one in five children between the ages of five and 10 are left alone during the school holidays. That is dangerous and it cannot be right. People live further than ever before from their families; grandparents are not always on the doorstep to help with care. There is thus a greater need than ever before for child care facilities.

[Mrs. Taylor]

It is important that any provision that is made be flexible. As I said before, what suits one family does not necessarily suit another. This has been a useful debate even if there has been no clear consensus. Most hon. Members have agreed that there should be some improvement in child care provision—that must be the way forward. It is important that the Commission considers our opinions but keeps matters as flexible as possible so that we can provide the right kind of care, not just for Members' children but for those of the staff of the House and of the staff whom we personally employ.

7.33 pm

Mr. Beith: With the leave of the House, I should like to thank hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. The Commission will want to consider their views carefully. If there was a consensus it may have been centred on the idea that voucher provision has a part to play, either as a step towards something else or by itself.

The figures that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) offered are way out of line with the advice that we have received. Our estimate of the number of those who might take up vouchers was only 82, and the numbers who might use a creche may be even smaller—so we are talking of figures of a very different order.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Crown Prosecution Service

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

7.34 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): One realises that justice is frequently portrayed in this country as blind. It is important, however, that it should not also be portrayed as deaf. This evening I want to raise the question of the identification of the general public with sentencing policy in the courts, particularly when horrendous and—one hopes—unique cases of murder are dealt with.

I should like to set out the circumstances in which the case of a constituent of mine, a Mr. Ryan Keen, was considered. A young and active man, he was well known in the town of Nantwich as a footballer. He was very popular and had worked extremely hard building up the local football team. Among the people connected with him were two men who chose, although they were 10 years older than him, to try to enter into a friendship with him. Those two men lured Ryan Keen first into a tour of various pubs and then to an address at which he was doused in paint stripper, whereupon lighted matches were thrown at him. The result was a horrific death involving 95 per cent. burns. I ask the House to consider the agony that that young man must have endured before he died.

I want to comment on some of the facts that were given during the trial because I think that they are relevant. Mr. Keen was said to have gone with the defendants to a pub where bar staff and customers alleged that they heard Card and Oliver, the two men initially charged with the murder, discussing setting someone alight. One witness said that as they were leaving the pub, Oliver told Card:

"I'll set light and don't you help."

The consultant pathologist who gave evidence in the case said:

"Ryan had extensive burns covering 95 per cent. of the total area of his body. The only area not burned was his foot. There is no possibility of anyone surviving burns like that."

He also gave evidence to the effect that Ryan suffered internal combustion, either by inhaling liquid which caught light inside him or by the fire passing down his throat. Traces of flammable liquid were found inside his stomach, an empty half-gallon bottle marked "white spirit" was found by the fire service officer on the floor and there was a powerful smell of the liquid in the house.

I give the House these horrendous details not out of any desire to shock but because, when dealing with such appalling cases, it is vital to understand the reactions of the public. In my constituency, a great deal of attention was paid to the case. The day-to-day evidence was reported in considerable detail. It was therefore a matter of shock when, after some days of evidence being heard, the charge was reduced from murder to one of manslaughter. There were press reports of a Crown Prosecution Service spokesman saying that there were no plans to appeal against the sentences.

The Minister will know that the sentences handed down, although commensurate with the charge of manslaughter, were fairly light—three and five years. The CPS spokesman was supposed to have said that they were

"about what you'd expect for manslaughter."

I find it difficult to understand why the charge was changed in this way half way through the case. I am not a lawyer, but I understand that defendants frequently change their plea at the initial hearing. The strength of our jury system and its very foundation is that it should decide the facts of a case—whether defendants are guilty or not guilty.

The jury was not permitted to reach such a conclusion. I have to ask, therefore: was there a plea bargain? If some kind of arrangement was reached, on what basis was it made? I have looked carefully at the official definitions of murder and manslaughter to try to relate those charges to what happened in this trial. Indeed, I have tried very hard to understand exactly why the procedure went as it did.

I wrote to the Attorney-General, raising with him the conduct of the case. I hesitate to use the word "derisory", but the sentences were very light given the nature of the death. I asked whether there was any way in which the state would appeal against them and seek a rather more exemplary punishment for the two men concerned. He was courteous enough to send me a detailed reply, which set out not only the range of sentence appropriate in any case but the behaviour that the judge would normally be expected to follow and the conclusions that he reached. He said that the judge set out

"the factual basis on which he passed sentence . . . He found that Oliver conceived a plan to punish Ryan Keen . . . "

having lured him

"to Oliver's house on the pretext of taking part in some form of dare and there to frighten him or injure him but only to some limited extent."

Frankly, if one douses a human being almost from head to toe in paint thinner then throws lighted matches at him, I find it difficult to understand that that is regarded as something that would not do irreparable harm. When I helped to run a general practice, we had an appalling death of someone who suffered the same degree of burns. The coroners court accepted that such a degree of burning could not be an accident. Therefore, both the parents and the neighbours of this boy find that initial fact very difficult to accept.

When I went further into the case, and even when I began to study the Attorney-General's letter closely, I found other things that I found difficult to understand. The Attorney-General said:

"I have also considered your concern regarding the acceptance of the pleas to manslaughter. As you are aware, Card and Oliver were initially tried for murder. It was only after the court and jury had heard the whole of the prosecution's case and after Oliver had given evidence that the trial judge asked to see all counsel in his chambers."

I have to ask: why at that point? Why were the pleas not changed initially? Why was so much of the case allowed to proceed? Is it true that there was not enough time for the whole of the case to continue? If so, why was it not adjourned? It would certainly have been difficult and expensive, but it would not have been impossible.

Let me ask some other questions that concern me greatly. If the plea bargain took place half way through the hearing, by whom was the decision taken? Was an arrangement reached between the judiciary and those who were defending and prosecuting the case? Who investigated, and what were their conclusions? What reasons were given for the plea bargaining? Why did the Crown Prosecution Service agree to drop the case after four days of hearing evidence?

When one looks closely at the management of the case, one sees the difficulty that the general public has in accepting the decisions that were handed down in relation to the two men. Most people, on a commonsense basis, would have accepted that what the two men were being tried for—murder—was the charge that they should have faced. What most reasonable people would find difficult to accept—myself among them—is why the charge was reduced to manslaughter.

I worry that the system may be moving away from a decision of a jury towards some form of Americanisation. Plea bargaining major sentences according to a number of factors—which, in this case, were not made clear in court or to the family, who were devastated by the decision—is an exceedingly dangerous habit to form.

A jury was in court. It heard the evidence and it should have taken the decision. If there was to be a change of plea, why was it allowed at that stage in the case? If the executive are doing deals with the judiciary, we are getting into a very dangerous situation and one that will have a direct effect on what happens in our courts.

The CPS must have believed that the evidence to charge the defendants with murder was sufficient otherwise it would not, I presume, have brought the case. So what happened four days into the hearing to change its mind?

In some instances, that may be in the general public interest. In, for example, the Guinness case it may have been in the public interest to consolidate a number of charges and to go for only one charge, but that does not apply in this instance. I do not believe, given the rules, that there should be plea bargaining in a case of murder. A full explanation should be given and such decisions should not be taken between the judiciary and the executive in secret. In my view, the family has been the victim of a slide towards the Americanisation of the British system. If there was a problem, the case should have been adjourned. There is a proper procedure and we cannot allow this kind of thing to happen.

I know that if the House of Commons ever gave instructions to judges about the decisions that they should take in relation to cases we would be sliding down an exceedingly dangerous slope. I do not seek to do that, but I wonder whether Ministers understand that ordinary people, knowing that they have lost a very loved child—a fit 20-year-old—in a heinous attack by two fit 30-year-olds, want a sentence that reflects the appalling fate that befell their child or a clear demonstration of why the system has failed them. They do not accept that the sentences passed on the two men were in any way commensurate with the crime. They do not accept that what happened during the trial was a true reflection of justice. They do not accept that a better fist could not have been made either of explaining openly what was happening or at least seeking to justify it. If that is their view, I have to tell the Minister that it is also mine.

I am desperately unhappy about what happened in the case of Ryan Keen. It may indeed be too late to do anything about the sentences passed on those two young men, which may now be an accurate reflection of the final charge that they faced, but I must tell the Minister that there is a public interest in proper justice, in openness and in a belief that we have the jury system to deliver some decision. That did not happen and many, many people wonder why.

7.49 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on raising this important matter which gives me the opportunity, first, to set out in general terms the basis on which charges may from time to time be altered, and then to deal with the specific case that she raised.

Justice is not blind. One can peer at virtually any statue of justice—in particular the one on top of the Old Bailey—and there is no blindfold around the eyes of justice. Justice has very sharp eyes and ears.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I were deeply concerned for the family in their sad and tragic loss. I have spent most of my life in the courts, principally in the criminal courts, and I am only too familiar with the anguish of parents in circumstances such as this. Ryan Keen had a most promising life ahead of him and it was a tragedy of the highest order that it was so dreadfully and wastefully cut short, as my right hon. and learned Friend said when he wrote to the hon. Lady on 16 November.

As I promised, I shall first deal with the general principles which the Crown Prosecution Service adopts in its selection of charges in criminal cases. They are not just plucked out of a hat. They are not just a matter of convenience. They are not based on the concept of cost. They are based on the principle of seeing that justice is done on the particular facts revealed by the evidence in the case.

Section 7 of the code for Crown prosecutors sets out the three principal criteria which are applied. First, the charge or charges must reflect the seriousness of the offending. Secondly, they must give the court adequate sentencing powers. Thirdly, they must enable the case to be presented in a clear and simple way. That latter factor is of special importance in cases of trial by jury, which this was.

In an ideal world it would be possible for the custody officer, who initiates the process of prosecution when a suspect is brought to a police station, to alight on a charge which remains the charge throughout the life of the prosecution until a verdict is returned either by the magistrates, if it is a summary offence, or by a jury, if it is a case tried on indictment.

But in the nature of things, that is not always possible. The custody officer may have only a limited account of what took place from the arresting officer who may have been unable to contact a number of important witnesses at that time. The custody officer must do his best on the facts as they are known to him to prefer an appropriate charge.

I have had the advantage in recent months of going to police stations throughout the country to observe custody officers dealing with suspects in the lively environment of custody suites at police stations. It is an instructive experience. On two recent occasions, I witnessed one in south Wales and another in Manchester.

The custody suite is not a place for peace and quiet or reflection. There may be tearful suspects, friends and relatives wanting their say, property to be gathered up and accounted for and other matters of a pressing nature with which the custody officer must deal. But he selects the charge at that stage on the basis of the facts as they are recounted to him. The astonishing thing is that so often the custody officer's sensing of the true charge is subsequently borne out when more facts come to hand. That is the first step in the prosecution process—the preferring of the charge by the custody officer.

The next stage is the consideration of the case by a lawyer in the CPS, usually a few weeks later when more evidence has been gathered together. It is hoped at that stage that the case will be complete or near complete. There may be much more evidence than that which the custody officer had the advantage of considering at the first stage.

It is not surprising that at that stage, which I shall call stage two, the charge preferred by the police may need to be withdrawn, substituted or added to. But the purpose of that is to comply with the three criteria in section 7 of the code which I outlined at the beginning of my speech. That in turn is designed to ensure that justice, according to law, is done in each case as it proceeds on its way through the courts.

Let me give a number of examples which may occur in the life of a case. It does not ossify after the lawyer in the CPS or after counsel has drafted the indictment, if he does, or if he approves the indictment drafted by a lawyer in the CPS. In the life of a case, sometimes the evidence changes dramatically.

The defence may submit medical reports or medical reports may come to hand as the result of an initiative taken by the CPS or the barrister instructed in the case. That evidence might tend to show that a defendant is not capable of forming a specific intent which is an essential ingredient in the offence. A witness may become too ill to testify, leave the country or die.

All those matters might put a different complexion on the case from that which originally appeared. It would be obtuse if those responsible for the prosecuting process did not take those changes in the evidential base into consideration in their framing of the charges or in their subsequent decisions on whether to accept a plea.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Solicitor-General give way?

The Solicitor-General: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment, but I would like to complete this stage of what I have to say because it might assist comprehension.

At some appropriate stage, either immediately before a defendant pleads to the indictment or at the end of the Crown case, or at any stage prior to a jury returning its verdict, the prosecution may decide to accept some plea to a charge lesser than the original one. That is not at all unusual. The decision may be based on the fact that the evidence on paper has not been borne out by the evidence given live by witnesses in the witness box, on oath. After that evidence has been tested in cross-examination and subjected to scrutiny and, possibly, witnesses have been called for the defence, it may become apparent that the view initially formed by the Crown is no longer borne out and that it would be contrary to the interests of justice to seek to maintain a case that is no longer supported by the evidence. The role of the prosecutor in such circumstances—whether that prosecutor be a Crown Prosecution Service lawyer in a magistrates court or a junior or leading counsel in the Crown court—is set out in section 9 of the code.

In those circumstances, the lawyer concerned should accept the defendant's pleas only if he concludes that the court will be able to pass a sentence that matches the seriousness of the offence. In no circumstances must the Crown accept a plea merely for reasons of convenience.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am sure that the Solicitor-General's Department has briefed him carefully, and that he has not come to the House unprepared. How many cases does he know of in which evidence was given to the court for four days and the judge then called counsel together and asked—presumably, though no clear statement was made about the matter—for a change in the pleas? If the Solicitor-General can assure me that that is not unusual but happens frequently, I think that the House of Commons should consider certain questions. I want him to tell me that what happened in this case was not unusual.

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Lady has a powerful crystal ball. I made a note of what I would say on that subject before I came into the Chamber: I wrote that the procedure adopted by the judge in this case was not unusual. It is with no disrespect to the officials who briefed me that I tell the hon. Lady that I do not need to ask them whether the procedure was unusual; having spent more than 30 years in the courts, I know from my own experience that it happens from time to time. I have been personally involved—both as prosecuting and as defending counsel—in cases in which such a procedure has taken place.

I hope that I can satisfy both the hon. Lady and the wider public that the procedure is not contrary to the interests of justice in the slightest; indeed, in appropriate cases it is very much in those interests. The objective is to ensure that justice is done—that a defendant is convicted of an offence of which the evidence shows him and no other to be guilty, and that that defendant is given a proper and appropriate sentence for that offence. Those are the twin purposes of accepting pleas in such circumstances.

The case of Card and Oliver did not last for three or four days, as the hon. Lady said. In fact, it started on 5 October and continued until 14 October—the Crown case alone, that is. On Monday 17 October, the defence made a submission that the murder case should not go to a jury. On that day the judge gave counsel an indication of his view, having rejected the submission.

On Tuesday 18 October, the judge gave a further indication. The defendants pleaded guilty to manslaughter, a plea accepted by the Crown, on Wednesday 19 October. The case lasted from 5 October until 19 October. Most of that time was occupied by the hearing of the Crown case in full and subsequently by the first defendant, Oliver, giving evidence in chief, being cross-examined by leading counsel for the Crown and then being re-examined. It was at that stage that the judge gave his final view.

There was no question of secret justice or consideration of matters that were not ventilated to the public. All the evidence from those whom it was intended to call—with the exception of two minor witnesses—was given. I can tell the hon. Lady, if she does not already know, that although the first defendant—Oliver—gave evidence, it was not the intention of the second defendant—Card—to give evidence, so no additional light would have been thrown on the case by his evidence. If memory serves me aright, the hon. Lady raised that point in one of the letters that she sent to us.

Let me make another correction to set the case in its proper context. The sentences were not as the hon. Lady described them; they were of an entirely different order of magnitude. The principal defendant, Oliver, was sent to prison for eight years, and the defendant Card for six years. I venture to suggest that that framework is rather different from the account given by the hon. Lady, doubtless in entirely good faith.

Let me explain in a little more detail how the case evolved. As the hon. Lady rightly said, the prosecution did not take the initiative in substituting a lesser charge or in any way seeking to compromise the case. The defendants were initially charged with murder and committed for trial on that basis; the Crown opened its case as a joint charge of murder, and conducted it in that way throughout. As I have said, at the end of the Crown case certain submissions were made.

The hon. Lady asked how, if a jury had been sworn to give a true verdict according to the evidence, a judge could express his view of the facts—which was then accepted by the Crown—and the jury could never complete their hearing of the case.

What took place was not unusual: I shall explain why it was entirely proper. The trial judge's function is to ensure that the quality of the evidence that is called justifies conviction. If, as in this case, the judge concludes that the nature and quality of the evidence are such that they do not justify conviction, he can convey that view to Crown counsel and defending counsel. Far from being improper, that is quite appropriate and the judge's duty as part of his supervisory power is to do just that.

The judge heard virtually all the evidence before expressing the view that in his judgment it would be inappropriate for the Crown to press for a conviction for murder and that such a conviction would be contrary to the justice of the case as he had heard it.

Leading counsel for the Crown was Mr. Anthony Evans QC, who is an experienced and robust counsel, and he did not rubber-stamp the judge's view. It would have been quite wrong for him to do that. He took the view into account and consulted those in the CPS who were instructing him. They concluded that in the circumstances of the case, it was right to accept pleas of manslaughter and not to continue to invite the jury to convict for murder because that would be contrary to the justice of the case.

The hon. Lady says that the trial should have continued. However, that would surely have been quite improper. The Farquharson guidelines indicate that, at that stage, Crown counsel is in charge of the prosecuting process. He had heard all the evidence and in consultation with the CPS he was of the view, as was Mr. Justice Waterhouse, who is an extremely experienced Queen's Bench judge, that it would have been calculated to lead to a miscarriage of justice if prosecuting counsel had allowed the case to go on. Quite properly, he adopted a course which is not unusual and decided to accept the pleas of manslaughter. The jury acquitted the defendants of murder and convicted them of manslaughter. The defendants were in charge of the jury on counts of murder and that was the only process

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

by which the case could be terminated. In the circumstances that I have outlined, it was the jury's verdict.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Of course, the Solicitor-General means that the jury was directed to come to that conclusion. He has said that the man who lit the match and flicked it did not give evidence. Is he convinced that all the evidence affecting the case had been heard? I accept any criticism that the Minister cares to make about the way I presented the case. But I am not a lawyer and it would be difficult to persuade people who have read the details of the case that there was not much more evidence to be heard.

The Solicitor-General: I fear that the hon. Lady is quite wrong about that. I have told her that there was virtually nothing more to be heard because Card did not intend to go into the witness box.

When the judge sentenced the two defendants he set out most clearly, as prosecuting counsel had done when he accepted the pleas, the basis upon which he was sentencing them. First, he said that the two defendants had formed a plan to teach Keen a lesson for getting involved with Card's ex-girlfriend. Keen was lured to Oliver's house on the pretext of taking part in some form of joke or dare. He was there doused with turpentine and frightened or the defendants intended to injure him in a minor way by using a flame.

With the greatest respect, the hon. Lady, who was not present in court, or anybody else who was not there, cannot second-guess the judge who heard all the evidence. Secondly, the judge concluded that Oliver was more involved in planning the event and that to prevent the deceased from chickening out, he offered to sit with the deceased while Card poured turpentine on both of them. Card then set alight the deceased's clothing. What is more, he also set Oliver alight and Oliver sustained some burns.

Thirdly, the judge found as a fact that both the offenders had much to drink and neither of them foresaw that the deceased would become a ball of flame or that his clothes were so combustible. Fourthly, and more importantly because it is crucial to the sentence which the judge subsequently passed, neither of the offenders had any intention of causing really serious injury to the deceased who was still their friend. Oliver attempted to extinguish the flames and Card's inactivity was a result of shock, not malice.

In view of those findings by the judge, it is quite wrong to view this case as one of murder and to invite my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to refer it to the Court of Appeal on the basis that the facts were other than the judge had found. In the circumstances which I have explained the prosecution accepted the plea to manslaughter. At the risk of becoming tedious, I repeat that it is not unusual for a trial judge who has formed such a clear view of the facts to indicate that view and it is wholly appropriate for the Crown to take notice.

The sentences of eight years for Oliver and six years for Card were within the range of sentences for offences of manslaughter. They were not light or derisory sentences, far from it. In my view, justice was dispensed in law and in fact.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 13 January 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Citizens Charter

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

[Relevant document: The First Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of Session 1994-95 on Maladministration and Redress (House of Commons Paper No. 112).]

9.35 am

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. David Hunt): I am pleased to have the opportunity to open the debate. It is only right for the House regularly to debate the performance of our public services and, of course, the reforms that the Government have introduced and the scope for further improvements.

The aim of the charter is clearly to raise the standard of public services and make them more responsive to users. The principles of the charter, which have transformed the quality of service throughout the country, are: the publication of standards, openness and information, the critical elements of choice and consultation, and the vital ingredients of courtesy and helpfulness and redress when things go wrong. Essentially—

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Value for money?

Mr. Hunt: Value for money for the taxpayer, and better quality of services for everyone.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The right hon. Gentleman talks about openness and information. Will he tell me why he has not replied to a question of mine which he was due to answer yesterday—it was down for answer yesterday—on perquisites and other expenditure by next steps agencies? The Prime Minister did not want to answer the question, and transferred it to the right hon. Gentleman. As the question was down for answer yesterday, and as I should have received an answer by 3.30 pm yesterday, will he explain why, in the interests of openness and information, I heard nothing from him?

Mr. Hunt: I greatly regret that the question has not been answered. I shall immediately look into what the right hon. Gentleman has said.

I strongly agree with the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service that the creation of next steps agencies has been a vital step forward. I equally agree that it is important to have openness and information across the Government machine.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has done more than any previous Prime Minister to extend openness and information. The verification and publication of the details of Cabinet Committees and the membership of them were never done when the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister, when I first became a Member. There is a series of other areas where my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has opened up the processes of government much more than ever before.

The citizens charter is clearly the cutting edge of the Government's reforms. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister launched the charter in July 1991, he had a clear and practical vision—a 10-year programme to ensure that public services do four things: first, as I have already said, to set and maintain demanding standards; secondly, to provide public information about performance to allow assessment and comparison; thirdly, to ensure that public services are responsive to the needs of users and offer prompt and effective redress when something goes wrong; and, fourthly, to achieve all that at a cost that the taxpayer can afford.

That is a clear vision, and one that I believe has struck a strong chord throughout the nation—so much so, that it is now clear that the charter is here to stay; so much so, that Opposition parties have rushed to claim credit for what was clearly the idea of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It is a vision that delivers practical benefits to ordinary people—so much so that Britain has become a world leader in public sector reform.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I am sure that we are all very much thinking of him at this sad time in his life.

There is a problem with a Labour council in my constituency. It frequently either does not respond to letters from my constituents, or it takes a very long time to do so. My constituents have asked me what redress they have against the council when it does not answer their letters, which is its worst and most serious offence. I estimate that about 80 per cent. of constituents' letters are never answered. What can be done when it does not answer them, or is slow to do so?

Mr. Hunt: I very much appreciate my hon. Friend's words of sympathy to me.

The most effective remedy against the sort of local council to which my hon. Friend referred is to have a Member of Parliament as assiduous as he is, who is prepared to raise the issue on the Floor of the House. It is outrageous that that local authority does not reply to letters. Often, some of the issues raised in them are extremely important, not just for the individual concerned but for a wider application. I very much hope that, when the leaders of that local authority hear of my hon. Friend's important and substantive criticism, they will immediately take steps to respond.

As I have said on previous occasions, one would think that it was not my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister but the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party that had thought up the idea of the citizens charter. Of course, that is not true. However, it is good that it is now clear that all the political parties support the principles behind the charter—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Not me.

Mr. Hunt: There is still a small minority of hon. Members who do not agree. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is joined by his hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who has said that the

[Mr. Hunt]

various charters are full of silly ideas, and the whole thing is nonsense. Of course, those on the Opposition Front Bench do not agree with either of the hon. Gentlemen.

That happens a great deal these days; indeed, it has become a characteristic. The Labour party has tried to paper over the cracks, but it has not been successful. No one can sell party policies or political parties like soap powders—it will not wash with the electorate. The new biologically improved Labour party is just the same as the Labour party we have always known. We were told in its new year message that it was to be a new, revitalised Labour party, but it is no different. However, the differences within the party are becoming more and more evident as each day passes.

The previous Labour spokesperson on the citizens charter, the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), said on BBC Newcastle:

"I think the idea is a good one . . . Consumers and citizens rights are crucial and I am pleased that everyone agrees."

The present spokesperson, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), recently pledged to keep the citizens charter, and I very much welcome that.

However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) pointed out, it is not much use using words to praise the citizens charter if they are not accompanied by a clear commitment to its principles. As he said, one of the most important things is the principle of response—and to respond quickly and with a quality service.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the public very much appreciate the citizens charter? Indeed, a survey has shown that 70 per cent. of the public now understand the strength of the charter and know how to make best use of it.

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more. I hope that other hon. Members will follow the clear objectives set out by my two hon. Friends in their interventions. I warmly welcome the fact that this is to be a full day's debate. I and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will listen carefully to all the points raised, as we are determined to strengthen the citizens charter even further.

I can now tell the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that I have just been advised that his question was not a named day question, and therefore did not need to be answered yesterday. I shall answer it early next week.

Mr. Kaufman: When my question is answered, will the right hon. Gentleman provide the information requested in it and not use one of the two get-outs—either that the cost to public funds would be too great, or that the information is not centrally available? As he has said that openness, information and quick response are the hallmarks of his Government, will he undertake to provide me with the information—which is Government information—that I have requested?

Mr. Hunt: I always thought that it was usual, especially with a right hon. Gentleman, that when an accusation is made that is then revealed not to be true, an apology is forthcoming.

Mr. Kaufman: I did not make an accusation: I made a request. However, in so far as what I said was not in accordance with the state of affairs, of course I withdraw it. I hope that, equally, now that I have done so, the right hon. Gentleman will respond to my intervention and tell me that he will provide me with the information that I seek.

Mr. Hunt: Now that the right hon. Gentleman has followed normal parliamentary conventions, I shall do the same in answering his question. Obviously, I cannot trail what my answer will be. He will receive it in the early part of next week.

As I said, Britain has become a world leader in public sector reform, with countries across the world accepting, adopting and adapting the charter principles. Last month, I opened the Service for the Citizen conference in London. It attracted more than 260 delegates from more than 30 countries—from Malta and Malawi, Norway and New Zealand and many others. As well as giving us the opportunity to share our experience with them, they were accepting this country's leadership role in public sector reform.

We are less than four years into the charter programme, but we now have a framework for reconciling the ever-growing demand for high-quality public services with the taxpayers' clear and justified reluctance to present a blank cheque to pay more and more for them. Previous Governments have always aspired to the ability to deliver better quality services with better value for money. We should take pride in the fact that we have made great progress in setting standards, providing information about performance, increasing responsiveness to users and improving value for money.

Standards of service are clearly set out for virtually every major public service. There are 40 published charters. The standards are demanding. There is no point in having simple targets that are easily achievable. When existing charters are revised, we constantly look for ways to set higher standards. Wherever possible, we do that after consulting users of the service. We shall have fresh proof of that continual drive for improvement over the coming weeks, when we shall publish a new and expanded patients charter and a new and expanded contributors charter for national insurance payers.

We are at the beginning of a new year. As Minister with responsibility for the citizens charter, the first of my new year resolutions is to see a real improvement in public services by the end of this year. The charter is not some monument carved in stone. It is an evolving programme, which is constantly setting new and challenging targets. Of course services will not meet each and every target on all occasions, but we are signalling clearly what the user has a right to expect and what each service should deliver. The result is clear, too—the user benefits, and standards improve.

There have been improvements in our hospitals. Waiting time guarantees have been met in all but a handful of cases. Waits of longer than 18 months are now virtually unheard of. It is not surprising, therefore, that, just a few days ago, even *The Guardian* noted that our national health service reforms

"have enabled a number of long-standing weaknesses to be tackled, and there is increasing evidence of improvements in services to patients".

Mr. Henderson: The right hon. Gentleman has made the point that waiting times have decreased for patients who might previously have waited one or two years, but

does he accept that, at the other end of the scale, there have been compensatory factors, and that many patients who are in a semi-chronic state and who previously might have waited three or four weeks for an operation now have to wait seven or eight weeks for that operation?

That largely explains the change in the statistics to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. Is not further evidence of that the fact that, overall, more patients are on the waiting list nationally in 1994 than there were in 1993? That is the case in my own health authority of Newcastle and North Tyneside.

Mr. Hunt: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The patients charter has seen a profound change in almost every aspect of the national health service, but the matter involves much more than that. He has failed to acknowledge that 1 million more patients are being treated, which is a significant achievement, and one to which he should pay tribute. He should also pay tribute to all the people who work in the NHS. They have revolutionised and transformed the quality of service for people who seek treatment.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): To help my right hon. Friend, did not the waiting list previously comprise people who wanted warts and tattoos removed? Is it not right that they should be pushed further back in the queue when priorities exist that might need more urgent attention?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. Every new treatment has a new waiting list. That includes minor treatments. Every time there is a new way of approaching an illness or a problem, there is a new waiting list. It is important for priorities to be set.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) should sometimes join me in listening to the "Today" programme, which he may have heard of. A few days ago, I heard the BBC correspondent pay tribute to the changes for the better in the NHS which have occurred as a result of the patients charter.

The Labour party, however, seems to have a propensity for always trying to find the bad news. Instead of praising the fact that there are 1 million more patients, it always looks for the one operation or one treatment that has a question mark over it, and for something that has gone wrong. I warn the hon. Gentleman that he will find it increasingly difficult. When I first came to the House in the 1970s, my postbag was full of complaints about the NHS, but that is no longer the case. My postbag is often filled with praise by patients and their families for the sympathetic and effective treatment they receive from the NHS.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I am sorry to intervene again, and I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that, as a result of the patients charter, where a doctor marks a patient's need for treatment as urgent, that treatment is delivered speedily? That was not the case formerly.

Mr. Hunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and agree with him. It is just another example of the way in which improvements are continually being secured for NHS patients.

Improvements have not been made just in money terms. It used to be all about just money. When we came to power in 1979, we were told that there would be an increasing shortage of money for the NHS and that it would not be safe in our hands. That has clearly been proved to be wrong. We have substantially increased the amount of money that goes into the NHS—it has gone up by more than 50 per cent. in real terms.

It is not just about money. The patients charter has introduced a new set of standards, and everyone in the service has done everything possible to meet them. My hon. Friends are therefore able to refer time and again to continual improvements.

Mr. Henderson *rose—*

Mr. Hunt: Before the hon. Gentleman intervenes, I shall say that we also listen and so do the NHS, the NHS trusts and everyone working in this great service. We listen to the ways in which further improvements can be achieved. I pay tribute to campaigns such as that run in the *Daily Mail* on single-sex wards. We listen all the time and try to find ways to improve and to introduce new standards that everyone can work towards. That is why the patients charter is such a considerable success.

Mr. Henderson: I do not wish to labour the point, but it would be remiss of me not to press the right hon. Gentleman further on the issue raised by his hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

Of course there is support across the House for the concept of the health service being more sensitive to the needs of people. There is no argument about that. The argument that does exist across the House, however, is that much of the patients charter has been hype, and that there has been a statistical movement to achieve the results in the reduction in the number of people waiting up to two years, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

People on the ground in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ealing, North know that the charter does not improve the national health service. Unless new resources are put into the NHS, and unless it is administered more efficiently, people will not obtain the service they demand.

Patients who are identified as needing urgent treatment and who receive it a bit more quickly than before are not, with respect, the main problem in the NHS. By and large, people who are in a serious condition and who need urgent treatment are treated, but people who suffer chronic conditions, have arthritic problems and need hip replacements are not. Those people are suffering because of the inefficiencies in our health service, regardless of what the Government claim.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is treading a dangerous path. I do not accept what he has said, and nor would any independent observer who compares the NHS today with the NHS in 1979.

The hon. Gentleman is pursuing an even more dangerous path in that he has just promised additional and extra resources for the NHS. I warn him that the leadership of his party has laid down clearly that no such pledge can be made. He is opening himself up to a Brown thunderbolt and he will be struck down, according to the latest way in which the Labour party is run. He said that we need to increase the real resources for that—

Mr. Henderson *rose—*

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is worried. I do not blame him, because the Chamber is beginning to be

[Mr. Hunt]

littered with bodies of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen who have been as dangerously irresponsible as he has just been.

Mr. Henderson: In the absence of my Labour colleagues this morning, apart from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), I feel bound to clarify the position. I said that there needs to be greater efficiency in the national health service so that more resources can be spent on priorities.

Mr. Hunt: Let the record stand; I just hope that it will not be read by his Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is dangerous to confuse the debate about resources with that about standards? Should we not stick to debating standards? The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) referred to patients with chronic conditions, but would he not do better to welcome the evidence of a fall in average waiting times and the fact that the new patients charter contains an explicit commitment on the length of time between a patient seeing a general practitioner and receiving an out-patient appointment to see a consultant? The Opposition have complained about that, but a standard is now being set in the patients charter.

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend has highlighted our argument, which is that the debate is not only about money—money is, of course, crucial, but we have more than lived up to our commitments on the funding of the national health service—but about standards, about making the nation comfortable in the knowledge that it has the best health service in the world and that the service will be readily available whenever the nation needs it. We constantly upgrade standards when we examine the patients charter and seek ways to improve targets.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) was scaremongering about the difficulty of getting treatment for chronic conditions such as those involving hip replacements? The hon. Gentleman should be aware that, in Sutton, the St. Helier's hospital trust can perform a hip replacement within nine weeks of a patient being referred by his general practitioner.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend has highlighted an achievement in her area, but there are centres of excellence providing treatments across the United Kingdom. We should be proud of them, but our target must be to bring all areas up to the level of the best. All hospitals and health service trusts should take as their benchmark the highest standards in the service. That is what the patients charter is all about.

Mr. Sykes: Does not my right hon. Friend find it galling to be given lectures by the Opposition on standards of health care as it was only in 1979 that the National Union of Public Employees and Confederation of Health Service Employees were picketing Scarborough hospital to decide which patients received treatment? What does that say about the Opposition's standards?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North is beginning to regret intervening on me in respect of the national health service. I recall vividly that my local hospital on Merseyside was also picketed when the Opposition were last in power. Pickets on the gate stopped ambulances entering the hospital. Ambulance doors were opened to allow the shop steward, who had no medical qualifications, to decide whether, in his opinion, the treatment required was urgent or non-urgent. The public were appalled, not only in Merseyside but elsewhere. That is the legacy with which the Labour party has to live. That was its record when it was last in power.

There have also been improvements in jobcentres. The good news is not only the rising number of vacancies but the falling number of unemployed. About 98 per cent. of those who become unemployed and become clients of the jobcentres are now seen within 10 minutes, even without an appointment.

That is very different from the Britain of the 1960s and 1970s and the old-fashioned employment exchanges which had bars on the windows. Jobcentres are now open-plan, and people are seen quickly. Two thirds of those who become unemployed come off the unemployment register and find a job within six months. That is a tremendous record for the Employment Service, and I pay tribute to it for that.

In all these ways, the citizens charter is now an established part of the fabric of British life. We expect tables detailing the performance of our schools and hospitals; we expect compensation if the trains let us down; we expect to be answered promptly and courteously; and we expect timed appointments in hospitals. We also expect effective complaint systems, and there is a fundamental change in people's awareness of how they should complain.

As I said clearly in my opening remarks, it is a charter principle that, when things go wrong, they should quickly be put right. There must be a well publicised and easy-to-use complaints procedure, with an independent element wherever possible. I think immediately of the revenue adjudicator, whose services from April will be available to those who have complaints about Customs and Excise.

The Government have taken seriously the question of complaints. We set up the independent complaints task force in 1993. It has now carried out more than 50 reviews of public service organisations and published a series of discussion papers, the last of which—on redress—was published on 6 January. I welcome the task force's contribution and look forward to receiving its final report later this year.

I also welcome the contribution made by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, whose first report into maladministration and redress was published on Wednesday. The Committee's report is an important input, and I and my colleagues will consider it carefully.

The charter also means proper information. My ministerial colleagues and I want the public to have more information on how public services are run, how much they cost, and how well they perform. That is my second new year resolution—more information to help users to understand and compare, to assert their rights and to exercise choice.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend consider whether it would be appropriate to have a separate charter, which could perhaps be called the

information provision charter? It could contain recommendations to Departments, local authorities and others on how to set up world wide web pages on the Government's Internet WWW server, thereby providing even more information to people about the standards of service they can expect, on how local authorities and Departments should act and, in response to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), on standards of reply to correspondence. Each Department and council could issue a statement on the WWW detailing the time in which they expect to reply to letters. Once that statement had been made, the public would know what standards to expect.

Mr. Hunt: I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in this respect. We have made a start, but this year there will be a rapid explosion in the amount of information available as all Government Departments are planning to put information on the Internet. I hope that we shall reach the position described by my hon. Friend, and look forward to consulting him on the best way to do so.

Performance in one area after another is being opened up for public inspection. Services from the railways to the courts to the Benefits Agency now publicise performance information locally, but achievements nationally are even more striking. We started three years ago with schools. Parents can now read about secondary school examination results, truancy rates and taught time. The publication of the third annual performance tables last November showed that almost 60 per cent. of secondary schools had increased the percentage of pupils getting at least five GCSEs at grades A to C.

The tables also stimulated public debate about value-added indicators to measure the performance of schools over time. National health service performance indicators were published for the first time last summer, enabling people to compare the achievements of hospitals against patients charter commitments for waiting times, cancelled operations and ambulance emergency responses.

The information revolution, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) has paid tribute, is being extended. I agree with him that we need to extend it to a wide range of local authority services. Already, every council has published statistics on the provision of home helps, residential care, leisure facilities, refuse collection, consumer protection and other services, including the police. This spring, the Audit Commission will publish the data in comparative form. Council tax payers will then know what they are getting for their money, and a new, powerful line of accountability will be established.

Another of our aims is to open up the internal processes of Government to the people we serve. Our code of practice on access to Government information, introduced last April, commits Departments to a number of specific obligations, including the publication of explanatory material on their dealings with members of the public. The Inland Revenue, for example, is now publishing the internal guidance used in local tax offices; it is available for public inspection. Such developments empower the user of public services. We have brought about real changes in the Departments and agencies that are in daily contact with the public.

In response to customer demand, we have put Government services on the streets. If a person wants a face-to-face meeting with a tax officer, a network of mobile tax inquiry centres set up in shopping precincts, town halls and libraries can bring advice directly. Some local benefit offices now run benefit road shows as well.

If customers choose still to go to the benefits office, the progressive introduction of one-stop shops means that they will be able to have their concerns over a wide range of benefits and social security allowances dealt with by one person, in one place, at one time. That is a tremendous advance, and a great improvement. I pay tribute to the Benefits Agency and to my ministerial colleagues in the Department of Social Security for their work in bringing that about.

Those improvements would not have been possible without reorganising the service providers themselves. The creation of executive agencies under the next steps initiative has enabled Government organisations to focus on the quality of the service they provide. The latest annual report of the next steps agencies gives many examples of high-quality service and commitments to further improvements. It is not surprising that the recent report by the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service on the future of the civil service welcomed both the citizens charter and the next steps programme, which it called the most successful reform of recent decades.

Responsive service is not limited to central Government; there are many examples elsewhere. One example is the Waltham Forest housing action trust, which gives residents a voice in choosing the type of housing in which they want to live. As a result, the trust is now replacing high-rise blocks with two-storey housing and garden flats. The introduction of two-storey housing follows a precedent set by many other authorities, and is extremely popular. Another example is Wandsworth's environmental services department, which introduced a noise control help line and a 24-hour investigation service after carrying out a MORI survey of residents' priorities.

Those organisations, together with many others right across the public sector, were among the 98 winners of the latest charter mark awards. In 1994, this scheme, the quality award of the citizens charter, attracted more than 500 applications and 20,000 expressions of interest. Among the winners were services from local authorities under the control of each of the main political parties.

I now want to move forward another stage. I believe that we must make the charter mark award much more the property of the public and that we must involve many more members of the public in the system. With the introduction of public nominations for honours, the Prime Minister has set up a system which has been a remarkable success. I want to extend that principle. I am pleased to announce that in 1995, for the first time, we will ask the public—the users of public services—to nominate organisations for a charter mark award.

My third resolution for 1995 is that I want more suggestions from the public, not only in terms of nominating what they believe to be examples in their area of excellence in delivery of the principles of the citizens charter, but in terms of how they believe services can be improved. The charter is not Government property; it is a charter that belongs to the people. Our plans for the charter mark will make that clear.

[Mr. Hunt]

The ownership of the citizens charter belongs to our people, and we are handing it over to them. We will also make new charter mark awards for the best customer suggestion and the best staff suggestion to be implemented. We will do everything we can to ensure that our best organisations get the recognition they deserve, and that their successful innovations are networked widely.

For that reason, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, and I will visit a range of charter mark winners during the next few months. We will talk to managers, staff and customers and find out how their tremendous enthusiasm can be used to make the charter mark an even more successful catalyst for improvements. I very much welcome the ready participation of my right hon. and hon. Friends in highlighting organisations in their constituencies which they are not only proud of, but believe deserve recognition. I hope that, helped by their constituents, they will be able to nominate many more organisations for consideration.

Value for money is another key principle of the citizens charter. We have taken a number of initiatives on contracting out and on competitive tendering. Those initiatives have been vital in enabling us to maintain and improve quality while containing costs. In local government, about £6 billion-worth of services a year are now subject to compulsory competitive tendering, which is being extended to cover services such as information technology, finance, engineering and property.

In central Government, the 1991 White Paper "Competing for Quality" introduced a full programme of privatisation, market testing and contracting out. I feel strongly that competition stimulates increased efficiency and improves quality. It is good for the users of services, good for taxpayers, who get better value for money, good for managers and staff, who can concentrate on core tasks, and good for business, with billions of pounds' worth of new opportunities.

I announced on Monday that, from April 1992 to September 1994, the competing for quality programme covered more than £2 billion-worth of Government activities, as well as 54,000 posts—one tenth of the entire civil service. Annual savings of more than £400 million—that is 20 per cent.—have been achieved, and that is a remarkable programme. That £400 million is now available for other services, other programmes and other improvements in services. Another ambitious programme worth £860 million is already under way.

Financial results have been impressive. But, as many of my hon. Friends have already pointed out in this debate, improvements in quality are the critical ingredient. Departments have been able to negotiate better quality in about a third of market tests, while fully maintaining the existing level of service in other cases.

In the past three and a half years, we have established a framework for delivering high-quality services at a cost that the taxpayer can afford. The great target now is to build on what we have already achieved. That is a challenge which the Government and service providers throughout the public sector will relish. The citizens charter has transformed the culture of our public service.

There may be some people who still feel that they do not have a voice. My final new year's resolution is to change that. I want everyone, including the most vulnerable in our society, to know that they really have a say in improving public services. That is, of course, what the citizens charter is all about.

10.20 am

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): May I first extend my sympathies and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and his family for the loss which they have suffered this week?

I am pleased that we are debating this subject today, although I must confess that I feel a little like the batsman who, together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), has the dilemma of deciding, in the absence of colleagues, whether to go for the runs or to protect one's wicket. I think that I will go for the runs, or at least make an attempt to do so.

Public services and their delivery are an important issue to the British people. There can be no doubt about that. It is right that Parliament should debate whether we have good public services, whether they are delivered efficiently, whether the citizens charter has played a part in any change in either of those factors and whether other matters have affected the level or the delivery of our public services. It would be wrong in a debate of this nature to avoid comments on the general role of public services and the way in which public expenditure has been prioritised on public services. It must be said that too much public expenditure in recent years has been directed towards dealing with the effects of unemployment and the related issues of community decay and rising crime, and that too little has been directed at investment in community needs, such as improved transport, education and training, and the environment.

We have heard the right hon. Gentleman's new year resolutions. I remind the House of some of the commitments that his predecessors made in dealing with the citizens charter. In a statement to the House in November 1992, the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), claimed that the 1991 White Paper

"launched a radical and far-reaching programme of reform and improvement of public services."

He went on to say:

"The citizens charter programme of public service reform and improvement is at the heart of the Government's agenda for the 1990s."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1992; Vol. 214, c. 869-70.]

The problem that the right hon. Gentleman had then, and his successor has this morning, is that, although the Government may agree with that approach, it is not necessarily helpful for them to say that something is at the heart of their agenda, because that does not convey any clarity to the public.

One thing about which the House can be in no doubt is that the public do not now know what the Government's agenda is. The public have been told many things, yet many other realities have resulted. The public were told that tax cuts were at the heart of the Government's

agenda, and they now know how hollow that was. The public were also told that bringing down crime was at the heart of the Government's agenda.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: In a second. The public must now be completely aware of the Government's failure to bring down crime levels. The public were told that post office privatisation was at the heart of the Government's agenda, and they now know how transitory that commitment was. The public were also told that the Tory Government would be at the heart of Europe, and they now know how quickly that has vanished from the agenda.

Mr. Deva: I shall ask my question in the kindest way possible on a Friday morning. The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to point out honestly that the Labour Benches were empty of hon. Members, other than the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I wonder if that is because the Labour party is not interested in the citizens charter and the services that it provides?

Mr. Henderson: I had anticipated that a Conservative Member would raise that point. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Labour party is very committed to improving public services, and if the citizens charter plays a part in that, the Labour party is committed to making the citizens charter effective and sensitive to the needs of the people. The reason why my colleagues are not with me this morning is that they are so excited by Labour's lead in the opinion polls that they are out campaigning to improve that lead even further. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) never likes to go over the top in such matters and has decided to give priority to discussing public services for the rest of the morning—I hope.

Mr. Sykes: While we are on the subject of absent Members, does not the hon. Gentleman regard it as very unfortunate that, on the day that the Liberal Democrats unveiled their Members of Parliament charter, there is not one Liberal Democrat in the House to be questioned?

Mr. Henderson: I am not going to defend the Liberal Democrats if they are not here to defend themselves. I shall leave the leader of the Liberal Democrats to respond to the hon. Gentleman when he returns from whatever he is doing this morning.

The issue is, are the public convinced of the citizens charter and do they understand this so-called far-reaching programme? I was tempted to intervene in the speech of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he was referring to the derivation of the citizens charter, but I thought better of it and thought that I would wait until I had the opportunity, if I caught your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to mention it myself.

The citizens charter is a useful concept, which dates back, my history books tell me, to Herbert Morrison of the London county council in 1921. He promised the citizens of London a charter on local government services. Increasingly, the Government are stealing ideas from the Labour party's manifesto—*[Interruption.]* Yes, yes. Many of the ideas which the Government now propose, where there is revisionism from the days of Thatcher, are often taken from common-sense ideas in Labour party manifestos, and the citizens charter is one of them. Indeed, the citizens charter concept was adopted by at least two Labour-controlled councils in the 1980s—Lewisham and York, which provide excellent services, according to the Government's own audited figures, to the people of those communities—long before the Prime Minister came forward with his proposals a year or two ago.

Mr. Harry Greenway: When the hon. Gentleman mentions Herbert Morrison, he is obviously, in going for the runs, in severe danger of being run out—if he has not been run out already. Herbert Morrison's promise to London was that he would build the Conservatives out. That was his only promise of any effect. He did that for a period, during which people could not buy their council homes, and so on. That was how he did it. In the end, it was a disaster for London, as recent history has shown.

Mr. Henderson: If that were true, it was because the Conservatives were not building any houses at all. Any houses built in London at that time were for ordinary people who saw the merit in having a Labour-controlled London county council. But that is a matter of history.

Mr. Sykes: I am sorry that we are all ganging up on the hon. Gentleman; it really is not fair. However, it is pretty rich of him to say that we are adopting Labour's clothes when the Labour party refuses to say that it will renationalise the railways, repeal the Jobseekers Bill or end any of our trade union reforms which were so successful in the 1980s or our education reforms. Labour has worn nearly all our clothes over the past 20 years.

Mr. Henderson: If I can get going, I shall refer later to the real differences between Labour's approach and the Government's approach to improving public services. The citizens charter is, by and large, a test of whether public services have improved. I hope that Conservative Members will recognise that the improvement must come from real changes in the way in which the services are delivered.

Are the public convinced of the effectiveness of the citizens charter? There has been a proliferation of charter-related activities: charter marks, charter networks, charter newsletters and a charter task force. The notorious cones hotline was apparently a commitment made on the hoof by the then Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), during an interview on the BBC's "Today" programme.

What has been the effect of the cones hotline which we see advertised on motorways as we drive around the country? In the last 12 months of its operation, 11,500 calls resulted in just five sets of cones being removed to some other location. Is not that a symbol of so much that is wrong with the Government's approach? It is back-of-the-envelope policy launched amid high hopes and wild claims which proves to be nothing more than an embarrassing damp squib and a waste of taxpayers' money.

What of charterline? Like the cones hotline, it was launched in a blaze of publicity. At the launch of the pilot scheme in February 1993, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) said:

> "Research has shown that there is a great public demand for a national charterline information service."

The Government forecast 30,000 calls a month to charterline. In the first weeks, there were a number of callers. Some rang about the Department of Social

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Security and the health service. However, other calls could only be classified as miscellaneous. One caller to charterline asked how he could get rid of foxes in his garden. Others wanted to know how to get rid of starlings from their roofs. Another man asked how to become a monk.

I would not want to veto calls to charterline. However, was that what was intended? One caller demonstrated what many taxpayers think. He rang to complain that the charterline was a waste of taxpayers' money. How correct he was. After 10 months of the project and £500,000 worth of expenditure, it was found that the charterline was receiving just 25 calls a day and that each call was costing £68. After all the trumpeting, as I understand it, the line had to be scrapped. I believe that the Government are currently considering whether it should be reintroduced.

High claims were made by the Child Support Agency when it introduced its charter in August 1993. The then chief executive, Ros Hepplewhite, wrote at the beginning of the charter:

"I am wholly committed to providing for our clients a service which is fast, efficient, confidential and accurate."

She went on to explain the agency's other ambitions. Under that charter, the agency stated that it expected that at least 65 per cent. of its customers would be satisfied and that maintenance would be calculated accurately. All hon. Members must be aware that the reality of the CSA's operation is very different. Not one of us can say that we have not received many calls and letters from constituents complaining about the appalling service that they have received from the CSA.

Those calls and letters do not come in one week or one month; if my constituents are typical, those complaints have been made from the inception of the CSA to the present day. I have been inundated by complaints from people who have been affected in one way or the other. Is that not evidence that a charter, in itself, does not necessarily improve public services? With regard to the CSA, the terms of the charter have not been met.

The CSA has acknowledged that 350,000 cases, out of a total of 1.1 million cases, have been outstanding for more than six months. The chief child support officer found that at least four in 10 maintenance payments ordered by the agency were wrong and that only one in six of the regional centres had been achieving its work targets.

Hon. Members are aware that those statistics have not been cobbled up by a bureaucrat sitting in an office. They are not statistics which bear no relationship to what is actually happening. Hon. Members know what is happening to their constituents. They are aware of their problems with the agency. The position has not improved since the resignation of the chief executive. The House will recall that, just before Christmas, the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), had to sneak out an announcement to the effect that the CSA was deferring indefinitely 350,000 cases involving benefit payments. We all look forward to the publication next week of a report on the CSA by the parliamentary ombudsman.

Is that not clear evidence that hype, advertising and the false promises of Planet Portillo do not improve public services and that real changes are needed? If that does not happen, charters like the CSA charter are not worth the paper they are printed on.

The same position applies in British Rail. Rail users have been issued with a long document which identifies their rights. Notwithstanding commitments that might be contained in the charter, because of other factors in the rail industry, one of the charter's main points—that people can obtain a ticket at a railway station anywhere in Britain to any other point in Britain—has not been met.

Although the Government say that they generally support the principle that tickets should be available at any station, because of BR's structure and the problems in that public service, the terms of that charter cannot be met. Is that not ridiculous? What a way to run a railway. Twentieth century dogma with 19th century structures is trying to run a service for the 21st century. Is it not little wonder that there is public scepticism about the effectiveness of the charter?

If the evidence that I have before me is accurate—I have no reason to believe that it is not—contrary to the point raised by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), two thirds of people interviewed in surveys do not believe that charters have been successful. In a National Opinion Polls survey, people were asked:

"Have you ever seen a copy of the Citizen's Charter or other Charters for public bodies, such as the British Rail Passenger's Charter or Parents' Charter?"

Only 34 per cent. said that they had seen a copy.

The NOP's second question is more telling:

"The Government claims that the Citizen's Charter will lead to real improvements in the quality of service people get from public bodies like the NHS, while opponents claim it is just a public relations exercise and will make no real difference. Which of these views is closer to your own?"

Sixty-six per cent. of those polled believed that charters were just a public relations exercise.

Similar evidence was revealed by a poll conducted by the Scottish Consumer Council which has been referred to widely in the literature and of which I am sure the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is aware. People were asked what they thought about the citizens charter. While 23 per cent. of people felt that there may have been some improvement in public services as a result of the charter, 37 per cent. felt that the citizens charter was not improving public services.

Lady Olga Maitland: It strikes me that the hon. Gentleman is being somewhat selective in respect of the polls and surveys to which he refers. Would he kindly tell us who published the surveys and exactly what questions were posed?

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Lady has not been listening. I said that one poll was carried out by NOP, one client of which is the Trades Union Congress—*[Interruption.]* Well, it is fair to say that the TUC represents a large spectrum of opinion. We are told that many Conservative voters are members of trade unions. However, that is not the point. National Opinion Polls is a reputable organisation. Its reputation is staked on the objectivity of its polling. I am certainly happy to take its evidence. If Conservative Members' cynicism is such that they cannot

even now accept what opinion polls tell them of people's attitudes, we really have sunk deep. I will take no lectures from the hon. Lady on that matter.

Mr. Kaufman: Is my hon. Friend aware that National Opinion Polls has been used in the past by the Conservative party for its private polling?

Mr. Henderson: I was aware of that, but it momentarily escaped my mind. I am extremely grateful for my right hon. Friend's assistance on that matter.

The public can see charters coming out of the ears of local and national government. There is scepticism. The only place where we do not have a charter is in Parliament. Perhaps we should have a parliamentary charter or, perhaps, a Conservative rebels charter, stating, "A Government Whip will reply to your question within two hours, letters will be replied to on the same day, and compensation will be paid, subject to Treasury approval." Perhaps we should have league tables for Conservative rebels. Perhaps that would convince the public of the Government's genuine commitment to the citizens charter.

Where does the scepticism come from? It comes from the public's own experience. It comes from what the public know about public services as they affect them and their families. For example, I refer to education, transport and health services, on which we have already had an exchange of views this morning.

One factor which must be brought into hospital waiting list statistics—it is not a constant factor that can be ignored—is when a potential patient enters the waiting list. I understand that it is when the first consultation takes place. The evidence in my constituency is that people have to wait longer for their first consultation; therefore, they do not appear on the waiting list statistics. However, I accept that, once they are in the statistics, there have been some improvements, although at the expense of people who would previously have been seen in three or four weeks but who now must wait seven or eight weeks.

Mr. Clappison: I raised that point with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about it, surely he will join me in welcoming the fact that the new patients charter will include a standard for the length of time between seeing a general practitioner and having an out-patient appointment with a consultant. Surely that is an example of the charter working. It highlights an important issue.

Mr. Henderson: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. If the charter clarifies for the public what is happening in the health service, of course that is welcome, but the problem is that the charter makes problems and commitments which cannot be honoured unless other things take place to improve the service. For example, there is a combination of human and capital resources in the health service.

Several things have been flushed out by the citizens charter: the Government's attitude to public services generally, the extent to which the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 apply when there are changes in the delivery of services and whether there should be protection for working people. We know that the Government have had to be dragged along at the end of the European queue on that matter.

No matter what the Government might claim about their commitment to public service, when it affects poorer people specifically, resources are not put in place. I am shocked that citizens advice bureaux budgets—the CAB must be central to the concept of assistance for the ordinary citizen—have been frozen for the next three years, according to the relevant schedules. That is regrettable, and it should be changed if the Government are genuinely committed to such matters.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster referred to access of information. The Government, in response to many pressures from the public and from the House, said, "We believe in open government." People asked, "If you believe in open government, why cannot an ordinary citizen ask questions on information which would be publicly available if a Member of Parliament asked a parliamentary question?" That seemed to be a reasonable point. The Government responded by introducing what they called the code of practice. If the right hon. Gentleman is sincere in his desire to extend freedom of information, there must be greater advertising so that the public know how they can find out information and what the procedures are.

The Government's record is appalling. Departments have spent only £43,000 on advertising the new code of practice. The Department for Education has spent only £581, and the Department of the Environment has spent £170. I obtained those figures from a parliamentary answer. They compare with the £5.7 million which was spent on advertising the virtues of the poll tax, and the £17.1 million which was spent on advertising the second British Telecom share offer. That puts into context the way in which the Government have allocated resources in this important matter. If they genuinely favour freedom of information and if they think that it is an important concomitant of the concept of a citizens charter, there must be greater commitment on their part.

I do not doubt that there are improvements in citizens' procedural rights. Some additional information is available. However, the main test of whether the citizens charter has been effective is surely whether public services are better. Are people receiving better, quicker and more effective treatment in the national health service? Is our education system improving, with higher standards of education for all our children, young people and adults? Is our transport system providing a better service? Is it tackling congestion problems in our cities? Is it tackling the problems of obtaining the necessary investment to provide transport in future? Are the public receiving the public services that they want?

The public's verdict, of course, is already clear for hon. Members to see, regardless of the opinion polls to which I have referred and which are disputed by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam. There have been two major sets of local government elections since the main claims were made about the citizens charter at the previous general election. On both occasions, the public completely rejected Conservative local government. They have not seen Conservative local government as being committed to public services or delivering public services efficiently, and they have seen no major improvement arising from the citizens charter, or they would have given the Government the result that they looked for during those elections. Patently, that did not happen. In addition, the public are concerned about their loss of control over public services because of the rapid growth in quangos.

[Mr. Henderson]

In his speech to the Conservative conference in October, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said:

"I joined the Conservative Party because it is the party which gives powers and responsibility to people, because we know that the state does not know best."

He continued:

"Through the Citizen's charter we are transferring power from bureaucrats and politicians in Whitehall and the Town Hall to ordinary people in the school hall and village hall."

That might be very laudable, but it is the ultimate in "I regret what I said at the party conference." The right hon. Gentleman knows that, regardless of the terms that he set out in that speech, that is not the Government's record.

The Government have centralised power in a sustained way over many years as a deliberate policy; indeed, they have made a virtue of having done so. Training and enterprise councils have taken over training and regeneration policies. Funding councils have been established for further and higher education. Urban development corporations are taking over urban regeneration in designated areas. I have in mind also housing action trusts, the Housing Corporation, health service trusts and the new police arrangements. They all take power from local people so that local representatives cannot have a say. All those arrangements are changing the way in which services are controlled by taking power away from ordinary people and elected representatives and by giving authority to people who are appointed by Secretaries of State.

Independent research has shown that, by 1996, unelected bodies will spend £54 billion of public money. A survey by the *Financial Times* in April 1993 found that quangos were responsible for a fifth of all public spending—a 20 per cent. increase on 1979. A report by the institute of local government studies in November 1993 found that there are now 17,000 members of unelected public bodies, compared to 25,000 councillors.

The Government have tried to dismiss the figures by arguing that there is now increased accountability through the citizens charter, but that has not been accepted even by many of the Government's own intellectuals—if that is not a contradiction in terms. I do not know whether Graham Mather, the Conservative Member of the European Parliament for Hampshire, North and Oxford, would like to be classified as a Conservative intellectual, but I have shared a platform with him on one or two occasions and he seems to bat above the average on these matters.

Mr. Mather says that there has been some centralisation of public services and adds:

"Where school boards and hospitals trusts are failing is when they're trapped in a system controlled by Whitehall and Whitehall civil servants setting standards, controlling cash and really taking decisions back on the Minister's desk instead of the local level."

That is what a Conservative representative says, so it is not only Opposition Members who feel that power has been taken away from local people and elected bodies. Prominent members of the Conservative party acknowledge that that has taken place. Some are reluctant and wary of the consequences of that, as Mr. Mather is, while others make a virtue out of the fact that power has been taken away from local representatives because they think that the Government know best.

An accompanying point must be acknowledged by the House. I do not think that a case could be made for the extension of quangos even if they had as members people who were, broadly speaking, representative of different currents of thought and who reflected different political attitudes. But that is not the case. The reality is that Conservative place-people—including relatives of some Conservative Members—have been given jobs in hospital trusts and other public bodies. That is not acceptable in a modern democracy, and it is not consistent with the principle of the citizens charter.

Lady Olga Maitland: The hon. Gentleman talks about increased centralisation. He might like to speak to parents in my constituency whose children are in grant-maintained schools. They are delighted that they are now able to take part in schools that are independent of the tyranny of local town halls, and they vote for that.

Mr. Henderson: With all due respect to the hon. Lady, I must tell her that if the Conservative Government say that they can no longer afford to fund those schools as they are cutting budgets, there will be no point in the parents bleating to the local authority that the services provided by that school are important for the local community, because the decision will be taken in Whitehall.

Mr. Sykes: I do not want to upset the hon. Gentleman, but perhaps he ought to phone Tony Blair to find out the answer to the question which I am about to ask him. If all that he has said is true, why is the Labour party committed to increasing the number of quangos by 2,536?

Mr. Henderson *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. May I remind hon. Members that it is not our custom to refer to another hon. Member by name? That is the prerogative of the Speaker and her deputies only.

Mr. Sykes: I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for that oversight.

Mr. Henderson: There was another oversight on the hon. Gentleman's part. He has not understood his central office brief, because even Conservative central office could not cook up statistics which show that figure. If the hon. Gentleman wants to send me details, I shall be happy to peruse them and give my response later to any point that he raises.

Mr. David Hunt: It might be helpful if a few facts were introduced into the hon. Gentleman's speech. There was a quango state in this country which existed at the time I came into the House in the 1970s. When the Conservative Government took over, the number of quangos was 2,167. We have reduced that number to 1,389. The figures which the hon. Gentleman is using include 2,668 housing associations which everyone knows are non-profit-making bodies run by unpaid committees of volunteers.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) pointed out, the hon. Gentleman is also including grant-maintained schools in the figures. The quango state is a Labour state, and my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) is quite right in saying that the Labour party has already made many

commitments which show that the number of quangos would go back up again if we ever had a Labour Government.

Mr. Henderson: The undemocratic state is a Conservative state, and people can see that with their own eyes and through their own experiences. They know that, regardless of what the right hon. Gentleman said, the amount of money which is now allocated directly by central Government to quangos is far greater than it has ever been—even under a Conservative Government. I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's point in any way.

People know that many of the services upon which they rely are now controlled by Whitehall. The money is dished out there and the people who administer the services are appointed there. If a person wants to complain, he has to go to Whitehall because going to his local office will have no impact whatsoever. That lack of democracy adds to the scepticism which the public clearly have about the benefits of the citizens charter.

In many instances, the public services are run on principles which have been rejected by companies that have adopted best practices in the private sector. The Government are always keen to tell the House that they want the public sector to act more like the private sector. Such is the reasoning behind the introduction of a number of changes such as compulsory competitive tendering, to which I shall come in a moment. Where there has been an introduction of private sector practices into the public sector, it has often been the worst practices and not the best.

Many claims have been made about the impact of compulsory competitive tendering. The Government have claimed that savings of about 6 per cent. have been made in the provision of services through compulsory tendering. Where those statistics have been shown to be—in a mathematical sense—accurate, it has often been because the quality of service has suffered. But other studies, which have examined the impact of CCT over a longer term, do not even accept that point.

A study by Professor Szymanski of the London Business School—an organisation not exactly sympathetic to some of the views of the Labour party—looked at CCT in the long term. He took examples of councils which put out contracts to tender in the early 1980s before there was a compulsory element. In the long term, the study shows that prices will begin to rise. In effect, a lot of private sector contractors introduce loss-leading in the early stages of a contract. Once a contractor has a contract, and the local authority has few real alternatives, up shoot the prices. That is interesting evidence which has been raised in relation to this matter.

Mr. Sykes: Can the hon. Gentleman name one single council where that has occurred in the past 10 years—in relation to cleansing services, for example?

Mr. Henderson: Wandsworth council had to change its tender because the contractor was not meeting standards and prices were rising. The council was not getting value for money and changed the contract. The evidence from Professor Szymanski was that, in the long term, Wandsworth—like other councils—will have to pay a higher price for getting private sector contracts because a monopoly will have developed and there will not be alternatives in particular areas. *[Interruption.]* I do believe that.

In any case, that is not my main quarrel with the changes which the Government have introduced. My main quarrel with CCT is that it has not really changed what is happening at a local level in the provision of public services. Low-paid workers have had their conditions reduced, and quality has suffered. Management still try to control workers with the stick, rather than any concept of the carrot. Budgets are spent whether or not there are any needs to be met at a particular time. There is little innovation by management or workers in an environment with little security, and often poor motivation.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): The hon. Gentleman has told the House that he believes that competitive tendering for local government services makes them more expensive. Can he produce one single example in which putting out to contract rubbish collection services has increased the price? Is it not a fact that substantial amounts of money have been saved by authority after authority following the example originally set by Wandsworth? They have done a tremendous favour to the nation. The service quality has improved and the price has fallen.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to the Minister for intervening, because I can give him the evidence from the study to which I referred by Professor Szymanski. Referring to refuse services, he says:

> "On average there were initial 20 per cent. savings in the tendered out services in the first two years but at the end of the five-year period costs were up 11 per cent. even though average staff numbers were down by 20 per cent."

I do not believe that compulsory competitive tendering has achieved the ends which the Government claim. They have not resulted in the adoption of the best practices of the private sector. Conservative Members who know anything about industry will recognise that. They will not recognise worker motivation and involvement, quality targets, workplace flexibility and teamwork or security of employment in the many privatised services now in place in different parts of the country.

Mr. Sykes: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that no one is entitled to security of employment in the 1990s? It is a nice thought. When the hon. Gentleman talks about security of employment, he is really talking about the closed shop.

Mr. Henderson: The hon. Gentleman has completely misunderstood the position. His thinking is old-fashioned. I am not talking about employers' fear of being forced to concede security of employment to their workers. I am talking about employers saying that those workers are so valuable to them, their business and operation that they want to build loyalty by giving workers the security that they would want for themselves and their families. That is the concept of security which I have watched advanced-thinking companies such as Nissan up in Sunderland develop over 10 years. That is what is important. I am not talking about contractual security imposed from outside. I am talking about internal organisations building their own loyalty. That concept has not been achieved through compulsory competitive tendering.

The same goes for market testing. Again, there is no real change. There are no initiatives and no new services. There is no extra motivation and no change in workplace

[Mr. Henderson]

attitudes. There is more stick and more insecurity. We need a genuinely new approach. Do we not first need a commitment to the concept of an efficient, good public service? Is it not crucial that the Government recognise that there is a need for democratic choice, that that choice should be devolved to the most local level possible and that citizens should exercise that democratic choice either directly or through their elected representatives?

Do we not need an approach which is dogma free and recognises the need for a mix of public and private in finding the funds for investment and bringing about the most effective form of delivery? In ridding ourselves of dogma, should we not move away from the presumption that privatisation is best and establish on merit whether a service is best delivered in private or public ownership?

Do we not need a regular review of services to examine whether new services can be provided? Should public sector departments not be encouraged to take community initiatives to achieve that aim and be given new appropriate statutory powers to do so? Should we not review the way in which we insist on rigid, annual budgets in most parts of public service? Private organisations carry funds forward from one year to another. Should not public sector organisations also be given that form of accounting without any detriment to the budget that they would have received? If we did that, we would stop the nonsense of parsimony in budgets from April to February and then profligacy in March before the end of the financial year. I notice from the faces of Conservative Members that they have experienced that in their areas, as I have in mine.

It is often said in the world of work that management get the workers they deserve. If management are stuffy, rule-book based, old-fashioned, inflexible and uncommunicative, it is little surprise that the work force mirror those attitudes? Is it not most important of all that a new sense of public service is instilled—a public service motivated at management, worker and democratic level; a public service based on secure, well-paid employment with high standards of training; a public service that uses the most modern technology and operational systems; a public service that has clear targets and is subject to rigorous audit; a public service which is initiative orientated; a public service of which we are proud, which we value and on which all of us can depend? If that is our purpose, we must support the changes necessary to achieve that.

If the citizens charter contributes to those changes, the Opposition will give it procedural support. However, I do not believe that the public scepticism about the way in which our public services are run and about the claims made for the citizens charter can be overcome unless real change takes place. We need new commitments on the need for public services and a new attitude to their delivery.

11.5 am

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): The citizens charter is the often-derided tip of a very large iceberg. Those who mock it are guilty of failing to realise the scale and significance of what lies under the surface. We are debating one of the most important developments in British politics in the 1990s. The fact that we are conducting the debate in such a thinly attended House, particularly on the Opposition Benches, speaks volumes about the way in which we as Members of Parliament understand our functions and responsibilities.

As it is clear that the importance of the citizens charter and what it stands for has not been widely understood, I shall say a few words about why it is so important, after which I shall draw attention to some of the problems that need to be acknowledged.

One of the biggest problems facing Governments in the late 20th century democracies is how to operate successful, good-quality public services when we have more or less reached the limits of taxpayers' willingness to pay for such services. The creation of the welfare state during the 70 years from Lloyd George in the Edwardian period to Keith Joseph mark I in the early 1970s was a heroic achievement, but it did not involve any fundamental innovations in how Britain was governed. It was accomplished simply by increasing taxation and enlarging the political and bureaucratic machinery that had been established in the middle of the 19th century.

The inexorable growth in the proportion of the national income taken in tax and redistributed by the state, which began in the first decade of this century, was bound to reach a limit some time. It did so in the 1970s—a decade marked throughout the advanced industrial world by taxpayers' revolts. In Britain, they took the form of waves of industrial unrest at the concept of a social wage and a social contract—the idea that the lower personal incomes brought about by higher taxes and wage restraint would be compensated for by higher spending on public services. The Heath and Callaghan Governments failed in that regard, and their failure marked the end of that sort of thinking.

In the past two decades in Britain, as elsewhere in the advanced democracies, all parties have backed off from policies that would involve large tax increases. That was beautifully illustrated in exchanges today between my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who was twitted so successfully on Labour's spending commitments. The Labour party's manifesto for the 1992 election was probably, although we will undoubtedly try to present it differently, the last gasp of the tax-and-spend philosophy. It remains to be seen whether my party will escape the damage that the Government inflicted on it by deciding to increase taxes rather than cut public services in the teeth of the recent recession.

Governments throughout the advanced industrial world face fundamental problems in relation to the welfare state. There are two contradictory pressures. As per capita incomes rise, there is a continuing rise in the expectations of users of public services. At the same time, the growth in the resources available for funding public services is limited, essentially, to the rate of growth in the economy. The fundamental significance of the citizens charter is that it is a serious and sustained effort to tackle that critical problem.

I said that the welfare state was built by expanding 19th century political and bureaucratic machinery. A Member of a late-Victorian Parliament, returning to this House in 1980, would certainly have no difficulty in recognising

the arrangements by which the welfare state was run, however enlarged and distended he might have thought them.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Would not the great difference that that gentleman would notice on returning to the House probably be waste? Is not the key question in the debate how we inject private enterprise efficiency into publicly owned services?

Mr. Jackson: I shall come to the argument about the use of private sector methods to improve efficiency. The Victorian Member would certainly have observed a large increase in waste and would have been very attentive to it because one of the central tenets of Victorian public finance was to reduce waste—I can cite the phenomenon of candle ends, Mr. Gladstone and all that.

At this stage in my argument, I am trying to show that the arrangements by which we expanded the welfare state were essentially 19th century arrangements that would have been familiar to a Victorian Member returning in the 1980s. He would have seen a monolithic civil service, employed on uniform terms and conditions—basically, the service created by the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the 1860s—which was simply expanded within the traditional structure of accountability to Parliament through Ministers. He would have observed that in operation here at Question Time and so on.

The citizens charter addresses the fundamental problems that I described by breaking through to a new concept of government. It recognises that there is no need for the delivery of public services to be organised through a monolithic civil service, which was part of the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord). Indeed, the traditional civil service uniformity of conditions may be an obstacle to efficiency and performance. Through the next steps agencies, the Government are recognising the way in which so many public service activities are discrete businesses that need to be run on lines that are specifically adapted to the immediate task in hand.

At the same time, we have begun to understand that 19th century ideas about political control and accountability were neither efficient nor effective, and I shall return to that subject. The tasks and objectives of agencies are now much more clearly spelt out by being embodied in contracts between them and central government.

The fundamental new principle that has been introduced in the past 10 years is that of a division of functions between purchasers and providers and the embodiment of their relations in contracts with specified standards of performance and clearly defined arrangements for monitoring performance against those standards. I have no doubt that all that is leading to a steady sharpening up of the performance of public service deliverers, while making much more transparent the relationship between those—including hon. Members—who are politically responsible for ensuring that a service is provided and those who are operationally responsible for ensuring that it is delivered efficiently and to a high standard.

Governments throughout the world are facing up to those problems—some more and some less successfully. It is a noteworthy fact, in which we can take some pride, that our thinking on such matters is more advanced than that almost anywhere else in the world. We are pioneering the new approach to public service provision in the 1990s, just as we pioneered the concept of privatisation in the 1980s.

Changes of the type under discussion cannot be accomplished in complex and continually evolving modern societies simply by devising a comprehensive blueprint and implementing it. We are bound to proceed by a process of trial and error and we have to admit error from time to time. We pursue a general strategy, with sensitivity to problems as they arise. We have to have the will to provide innovative solutions to those problems when we see them. We must also be prepared from time to time to recognise when the problems are such that they require some adjustment to the overall strategy. The Government have been working sensibly in that fashion, as they have put in hand the massive programme of changes that they have undertaken. There are a number of problems, however, for which we have not yet found adequate solutions. We must recognise that some may require modifications to the general strategy.

First, and probably most important, is the problem of ensuring that the Government operate as an intelligent purchaser on their side of the purchaser-provider divide. We have put an enormous amount of energy into the organisation of providers, so that in many sectors we have an extensive array of lean, mean and competitive providers of public services. I am not convinced, however, that the Government's capacity, both centrally and locally, to make sensible long-term purchasing decisions has also been commensurately developed. In particular, the problem of short-termism seems to be institutionalised in our public finance system and the way in which the Treasury operates. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North put some sound arguments on that.

Some stability is required for any large-scale organisation to flourish, especially if it is operating in the intangible area of services whose quality depends largely on the morale and motivation of huge numbers of professional and semi-professional employees. We will do ourselves a disservice and will risk discrediting the new approach to public service provision if the new relationship between the Government as purchaser and the agencies as providers simply maximises the impact of stop-go policies.

The second problem has a more philosophical character. We must recognise that there is a difference between co-operative and contractual models of organisation and that both have their value and their part to play. My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central pointed that out in his intervention. The citizens charter is based on the extension of essentially private sector contractualist ideas into a public service world that has traditionally been based on an ethos of co-operation. That is not a bad thing—there is always a danger that the co-operative ethos among producers can become introverted and self-serving, rather than oriented towards service users. That was recognised as long ago as Adam Smith, but we must recognise that there is a great diversity in human psychology and in organisations and that what may be appropriate structures of incentive and disincentive in one type of organisation may not always be appropriate in others. There are also problems of

[Mr. Jackson]

hybridisation. It may not be possible successfully to combine those two different philosophies in a single organisation.

Mr. Lord: I am following my hon. Friend's argument carefully. Is not one of the changes that has taken place in the past 30 years a change in the relationship between elected councillors, responsible for spending a large amount of public money, and their officers? The same is probably true of the relationship in Whitehall between civil servants and Ministers. There has been a notable shift in power away from the elected member, just as the amounts of money involved have hugely increased. Would my hon. Friend like to comment on that?

Mr. Jackson: I want to say something about the problems of accountability, especially as they relate to the House. My hon. Friend is right. There is a sense in which the reforms are designed to restore a greater measure of political control over the operation of those great programmes, by enabling the political leadership to define much more clearly what it expects to get out of them, by setting the objectives and standards and by devising performance standards, so that there is a way of getting some sort of political handle on the operation of those great sums of money.

I was trying to argue that we have to be careful about the way in which we combine a contractualist approach to organisations with a co-operative approach. One striking aspect of how contractualism may be at odds with co-operative organisational models relates to pay—an absolutely critical question. The private sector gurus who advise on the organisation of public service agencies tend to attach great importance to financial incentives for individuals. I am sceptical about the universal applicability of that. High pay for top executives and individualised performance contracts are an American and Anglo-Saxon fashion. They are much less common, even in the private sector, in mainland Europe and Japan—arguably more successful economies. We are all becoming increasingly familiar with the problems posed by those individualised pay arrangements in terms of both public credibility of the leadership of organisations, and of employees' morale. We need to think again on that issue.

The problem of political accountability, which has arisen time and again in this debate, is posed by all those new developments. The telling points about centralisation made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North simply cannot be dismissed. I propose not to follow him but to draw attention to the problem of accountability as it relates to this House.

Parliament still operates within the parameters of the 19th century system of government. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who will speak in the debate, is an eloquent exponent of that topic, but he fails to recognise that the old system that he defends was never adequate to cope with the vast expansion of responsibilities assumed by the state in the first part of this century. If the machinery for accountability embodied in this House was inadequate for the era in which, as Nye Bevan put it, Ministers were held responsible for every dropped bedpan in the national health service, how much more inadequate are its arrangements in the face of the new dispensation emerging under the banner of the citizens charter?

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central, that new dispensation provides enormous opportunities for hon. Members to assert greater control and direction over public services. The making of public service contracts allows much greater sharpness in priority setting than was possible in the past. The contractual arrangements between central Departments and agencies generate a huge new flow of information about performance standards. If the House had the right structures, there is no reason why we should not play an effective part in guiding Ministers in setting strategies, determining priorities and monitoring performance. But do we have the will to do so? The attendance at today's debate shows that we have not yet even begun to understand the scale of those possibilities.

Finally, I want to say a word about the limits of the citizens charter philosophy and programmes based on it. Earlier, I said that I regard the charter as an attempt to meet rising expectations of quality in the public services when people's willingness to pay for those services through taxes is strictly limited. I have no doubt that quality improvements in our public services can be achieved through the charter by making them more businesslike, but we must recognise that, ultimately, the quality of public service—as of any service—is, more than anything else, a function of the financial resources available to support it. Ultimately, we get what we pay for. In that sense, the citizens charter approach faces the prospect of diminishing returns.

One of the great paradoxes of today's society is the contrast between the public sector's increasing affluence, in which real incomes have risen by 40 per cent. since 1979, and the financial constraints under which our public services labour. I have a picture in my mind of parents in constituencies like mine driving back to comfortable, centrally heated homes in their Volvos and BMWs from meetings in draughty, old-fashioned school buildings to write angry letters—nowadays increasingly to send them by fax—to their Member of Parliament complaining about cuts affecting local schools. Many of them could easily afford to make up the amount of those cuts from their substantially increased disposable incomes if they were able to do so.

The logic of my argument is that, over the years, the element in the charter approach that asks, "Must the Government be responsible for it?" will become increasingly important. That should not be thought of, as it may have been until now, as a question that leads to the complete withdrawal of publicly funded provision. We need more halfway houses between public and private responsibility. So far, Britain has not been especially innovative in developing co-operative modes of finance by which individuals who benefit from a public service make an individual financial contribution to support it, alongside the contribution which we all make through the tax system. Our approach still tends to be that services must be either wholly in the private marketplace or provided entirely free on the back of a tax system. In the future, it will be increasingly necessary for us to seek ways in which we can bridge that gap.

The citizens charter of the future will ensure that the growing personal incomes which rising productivity is delivering to our people can be directed to not only private consumption—more holidays and consumer goods—but the consumption of mixed public and private goods and the support of public services.

11.25 am

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) provided the House with an extremely thoughtful speech and I shall refer to some of his arguments. First, however, I contrast the picture that he drew of his constituency with one of the constituency that I represent. He has made it clear that he represents an affluent south of England constituency, where his constituents drive from centrally heated homes in their Volvos and can often communicate with their Members of Parliament by fax machine. I compliment the hon. Member and his constituents on their affluence.

My constituents are very different people. I represent an inner-city constituency where many thousands of my constituents live in great poverty. We have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Youth unemployment is 40 per cent. in parts of my constituency. We have a dreadful housing problem, which is not assisted by the complete end to council house building and the fact that housing associations cannot respond out of their resources to my constituents' needs, however hard they try with the aid of the Housing Act 1974, which, as junior Housing Minister, I put through 20 years ago.

Some people, because of poverty, deprivation and domestic circumstances, require assistance from public services in a proportion almost incomparable with the requirements on such a public service in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is therefore my duty to speak for my constituents who need public services. Many of them literally cannot survive without public services, and currently receive nothing like the level or standard of public services they require.

The concept of public service is not unique to, or possessed by, a single party in the House of Commons. I echo the comments by the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) about the absence of the Liberal Democrats today. They flood my constituency with their cheap and boastful little leaflets about the need for public service, but when it comes to the House having a full debate on public service, they are nowhere to be seen. Their hypocrisy is demonstrated by their failure to show any interest whatever in today's debate. But that party, in the days when it was a serious and reputable political party, advanced the concept of public service. The Conservative party has a long and honourable history of participating in and innovating public services. The Chamberlains in Birmingham were the parents of modern public service as we see it. My party, the Labour party, has been associated throughout its history with the need for public services.

The problem is not confined to the deterioration in the quality and availability of public services, for it extends to the erosion of the very concept of public service. I was sorry that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster contributed to the erosion by his use of a word that I find one of the most offensive in this context. It is used by those who should be providing a service.

I refer to "customer". When we buy something in a shop, we are customers, but British Rail and London Underground now refer to passengers as customers. That strikes me as something more than merely the change of a word. It is the change of an entire concept, whereby public transport, which used to be provided as a service, is regarded as a commodity to be sold rather than a service to be provided. In the case of British Rail and London Underground, it is not, unfortunately, being provided to the highest standard.

It is even worse when "customer" is used in the service and caring sectors. I find it offensive when the chief executive of the Benefits Agency refers to my constituents as customers. Those of my constituents who go to the Benefits Agency in need of income support or a crisis loan are not customers. They are not buying anything. They only wish that they had the wherewithal to buy things. Those of my constituents who find themselves in that position may be clients, but I fear that they are applicants. The ethos of the commercialisation of public service is one that we should examine extremely seriously.

The deterioration of public service is happening through privatisation and through the creation of the next steps agencies. In so far as the citizens charter can ameliorate that, I welcome it. The charter should be available to assist those who require good public services. The problem is that the nature of service is being removed.

Let us consider some of the privatised industries, and especially British Telecom. With the relative failure of Mercury, BT is much more, even that it was before, a monopoly service—I accept that the cable companies provide some telephone services. British Telecom is an enormously cash-rich organisation. Unfortunately, it is no longer motivated by service and seems not to understand the nature of it.

I have a press release that was issued on 3 January from Mike Hepher, the group managing director of BT, in which he states:

"BT keeps its pledge to reduce prices and improve value for money for its customers."

He bases that on a cut in the cost of transatlantic telephone calls.

The passage that I have quoted appears on page 1. At the bottom of page 2, we learn that the rental of a BT telephone line will rise by 4.6 per cent. on 1 February. That is way beyond the current rate of inflation. The increase is being imposed by an organisation that has more liquid cash at its disposal than any other in the United Kingdom. Its profits are greater than those of any other organisation, and that is partly through its almost monopolistic position.

Business people who need to make transatlantic calls will get them cheaper. My constituents, and specifically pensioners, who depend on their telephone not only for an emergency, as BT seems to imagine, but as a lifeline to their families and friends, will have to pay more. That is not a concept of public service. The increase in current revenues is being paid for by my constituents and others—not by rich organisations—who are living in poverty.

It is not only at national level that BT is failing in its duty. For more than eight months, I have been in correspondence with BT about two telephone boxes in my constituency which are a focus of vandalism and hooliganism. Local residents and shopkeepers have complained. The police have asked for the telephone boxes to be moved. As I have said, I have been in correspondence repeatedly with BT for eight months, asking it to remove what are recognised by the police and my constituents as a cause of crime. Nothing has been done and there is no sign that anything will be done.

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

I think that all hon. Members are appalled by the notion that the number of offices where through railway tickets can be bought is to be reduced. Only recently, the Prime Minister said that he did not want that to happen. Unfortunately, the Government's legislation gives the Secretary of State for Transport only an advisory role in dealing with through ticketing.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that he is talking about outrageous scaremongering. His example of through ticketing involves an exercise that was put forward as an idea, not as a policy. It is important that that is made abundantly clear to rail travellers.

Mr. Kaufman: It should be made clear also to the regulator. It is the regulator who has put it forward, not some anonymous person in the street. We need a commitment from the regulator about through ticketing. If that is not forthcoming, the viability of the railways as a transport system will be lost. If that happens, the hon. Lady will be the first to complain.

The hon. Lady rises, rightly, to complain about the role of the director general of the prison service, about whom I shall something to say before I resume my place. But the hon. Lady should be careful about leaping to her feet before she knows what will happen about ticketing. She represents a commuter area. It is my guess that, within a year from now, the hon. Lady will be joining me and many of her hon. Friends in trying to ensure that the through ticketing system is put right.

Let us consider what is happening through privatisation at a local level. When I had any problems relating to British Rail in the past, I was able to write to the chairman, who would respond. I am not saying that the response was always satisfactory, but there was always a clear line of accountability. In the end, if I did not get done what I wanted, I would have a clear explanation from the man at the top. During that period I knew where to go.

For many months, there have been three issues in my constituency on which I would have written to the chairman of British Rail. One issue may be regarded by hon. Members as trivial, but it is not trivial to my constituents. It involves the state of Glencastle road, which is owned by British Rail, not by the local authority. There are huge accumulations of rubbish, which are a health hazard.

The second issue is the Vine street sub-station of British Rail, which was a danger to children. Another related to a piece of railway line next to the Abbey Hey football club in my constituency, where children were able to stray on to the line. In two of the three cases, there was a danger to children's lives; in the third, there was and is a danger to the health of my constituents.

Before the privatisation legislation went through the House, I would have written to the chairman of British Rail. I have tried to find out who now has responsibility. I wrote to Railtrack, but received no response on any of the three issues. I wrote to Railtrack again, and again received no response. I wrote again, and again received no response. I then wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport, and I received no response. I wrote to him again, and again received no response. I then wrote to the Prime Minister, and I did receive a response. He has an efficient office that deals fairly promptly with correspondence.

As a result of my correspondence with the Prime Minister's office, I received a letter from the Secretary of State for Transport saying that certain things would happen. They did not. I wrote to him again, and I received a response this week advising me to write to Railtrack. Railtrack repeatedly does not reply, the Secretary of State for Transport does not reply, the Prime Minister does reply—as a result of which, I receive a response from the Secretary of State for Transport—but in the end I am asked to get on board the merry-go-round again. Meanwhile, and after many months, the problems for my constituents continue. There is no longer any clear line of accountability.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) made a sensible intervention in the speech of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, saying that it was outrageous that letters from his constituents to their local authority received no response. The right hon. Gentleman agreed with his hon. Friend, and stressed the importance of people receiving a quick response. He said that he expected letters to be answered promptly and courteously, and that when things went wrong they should be quickly put right. However, although he said that, the fact is that what is happening in my constituency is also happening throughout the country.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman properly raises in this House important constituency matters that he says are not being addressed by Railtrack. I have to say that I do not think that that is a national phenomenon, and I do not know why it is happening in his constituency.

I raised a matter, of equal importance to my constituents, about a railway bridge and pigeon droppings. The then responsible authority, British Rail, failed to respond over a number of months. In the very week that Railtrack came into existence, it answered the letter, and then arranged a site meeting within a week.

I am satisfied, on behalf of my constituents, with the response that I have received from Railtrack. I do not know what has gone wrong for the right hon. Gentleman, but I agree that Railtrack should respond.

Mr. Kaufman: I congratulate the Minister on his success. Perhaps in his reply, in correspondence or in conversation he could tell me his secret—how does he get a reply from Railtrack when neither I nor even the Secretary of State for Transport can get one? Responsiveness is absolutely crucial. When lives are at stake—and children's lives have been at stake—action must be taken. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that things must be improved.

I want to raise a matter relating to the water industry. North West Water, which runs the water industry in my constituency, is involved in export activity—good luck to it—but it is also involved in asset-stripping—not good luck to it. It is trying to destroy the one amenity of wild country available to my constituents. It is not providing a decent service in water and sewerage provision to many of my constituents. In a recent episode, the water supply to people living in part of Gorton was so poor that they were afraid to use their toilets because of the lack of water, and they had to operate a street shift system for taking baths.

North West Water failed to respond—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) may giggle, but the matter is important to my constituents. They do not receive a decent water supply, yet the chief executive of the water authority has received a 571 per cent. pay increase. I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not regard the most basic service of all—the supply of water—as something to giggle about.

Mr. Lord: The right hon. Gentleman may know that I stood for, and failed to win, the seat of Manchester, Gorton in 1979, when it had rather different boundaries. In fact, I was born in that part of the world, and I care very much for it. I am horrified to hear of what is happening in his constituency, and of how long it is taking to sort things out. Certainly, if lives are at risk and nothing has been done for eight months, I suggest that he disregards the Wantage faxes and the postal service, and gets on his much-maligned telephone and sorts people out before lives are lost.

Mr. Kaufman: The problem is that I do not know who to telephone—*[Interruption.]* I do not. I have dealt with three different Railtrack offices, none of which appears ready to acknowledge responsibility. I can show the hon. Gentleman my large file of papers. Getting on the telephone would do no good. If the Prime Minister cannot get action, a telephone call to some untraceable person is not likely to help. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on having been a candidate in Gorton. It was in the days when Conservative candidates had appreciable votes in Gorton. No doubt he had quite a good vote.

I want to raise the question of the line of accountability in the national health service. The Gorton medical centre in my constituency has a patient list of 9,000 people. I visited the centre a couple of months ago at the request both of my constituents and of the centre's doctors. I found a waiting room so tiny that mothers with babies and elderly people had to stand while waiting to see the doctor. The filing and nursing rooms were inadequate for their needs. There were unacceptable toilet facilities.

The doctors want to add a new storey to the medical centre and rearrange the facilities, which would cost £150,000. That could be financed by the chief executive of North West Water handing over part of his salary increase. The Health and Safety Executive has declared the premises unsatisfactory, so the centre will have to rent a shop across the road, where the annual charge for rates and local utilities will be £8,500. People trying to get from the shop to the centre will have to cross an extremely busy road, and could be involved in traffic accidents. Additional staff will have to be engaged and paid.

I wrote to the Secretary of State for help. She passed me on to the North-West regional health authority. It passed me on to the family health services authority. So I have been passed from the Secretary of State to the RHA to the FHSA. The latter authority has replied to me, but on different notepaper with different headings—one being the Manchester health services authority and the other the Manchester health commission. Again, after several letters, they are not committing themselves to providing what is a tiny amount of money in the national conspectus. That money is required to provide 9,000 people with a decent health centre. That is the sort of experience we have in my constituency.

Some people are not answerable at all. Two of my constituents, both severe schizophrenics, have walked out of a local health facility and committed suicide. One was found in a canal and the other on a railway line. In both cases, the hospital was told by relatives that those two constituents needed watching because they were suicidal—one of them had already attempted suicide. Over many months, we have had no response to how that was allowed to take place.

On the basis of public-spiritedness, a constituent of mine agreed to go along to Manchester royal infirmary hospital at the invitation of doctors who were giving a course to students. His medical experience was such that they found him a useful person to be present. But he did not return home overnight, and his family were extremely distressed and concerned. It was found that he had died in the hospital, and that his corpse had been left there. We are still trying to sort out how that happened.

We have no proper lines of accountability in a national health service that is simply a series of organisations that delegate to each other. Not one of them seems to be ready to accept responsibility.

That is what troubles me. The hon. Member for Wantage talked about accountability. Accountability is not some empty concept. Of course parliamentary accountability must change over generations and over decades—I accept that entirely. The nature of a service may require different sorts of parliamentary accountability. But what is accountability about in the end? It is not about whether Members of Parliament have our egos inflated by a Minister replying to us in answer to a question or in a letter. It is about the fact that we come here to represent individuals and to obtain redress for them.

The whole of the British parliamentary system is based on the constituent's right of redress of grievance. One of the reasons why I champion the single-member constituency, with a Member elected by a single majority vote, and disagree with systems of proportional representation, is that every individual should know who his or her Member of Parliament is. They should be able to go to that Member of Parliament and to receive a response.

I do not necessarily mean to get the thing put right—many things cannot be put right—but the constituent should be able to receive a response, an explanation and, if possible, redress. The creation of the next steps agencies is taking that right away from my constituents and from those of Conservative Members.

The Home Secretary has enunciated an extremely dangerous doctrine, which I hope he will think about carefully. It states that a Minister is responsible for policy and the agency is responsible for administration. When I questioned him about that in the House on Monday, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he was responsible for the whole of the Prison Service, but he made it clear in his answers on Whitemoor and Parkhurst that that responsibility does not extend to responsibility when things go wrong. It apparently goes to Mr. Derek Lewis, but Mr. Lewis does not seem to be ready to accept that anything has gone wrong. Repeated escapes of high-security prisoners and the extraordinary lack of security in some of our major gaols are his responsibility, if they are anybody's.

[Mr. Kaufman]

I thought it sad that the Home Secretary appeared on Monday to penalise the governor of Parkhurst on the basis that, allegedly, he had not carried out what the Director General of the Prison Service had told him to do. Why did not the director general take steps to ascertain that his instructions had been carried out?

Chief executives of agencies receive salaries that are far above those of Ministers of the Crown, who answer to the House. Mr. Lewis has a salary this year, including his bonus, of £160,000. Mr. Bichard of the Benefits Agency has a salary of £83,000. Those salaries are way beyond what the Prime Minister receives, yet those people are accountable to no one for what they do. When they suffer injury or have a complaint, my constituents have no one who is accountable to the House of Commons.

I am not the only person in the House who has a grievance about the Child Support Agency—my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) has mentioned episodes, as will other hon. Members.

I have been in correspondence with the Secretary of State for Social Security for months about a case involving one of constituents, whom I shall, of course, not name but who lives in Levenshulme. In his most recent letter to me, the Secretary of State said that the agency's centre in Dudley had advised my constituent that he had not returned a form. My constituent told me that he did return the form and, what is more, he telephoned the agency to say that he had returned it.

My constituent is still having to pay support not only for his child, whom he is perfectly willing to support, but for his ex-wife, who has married someone else. After six months, we cannot get any redress for my constituent. Thousands and thousands of other people are in that position.

Services are deteriorating through privatisation and through the creation of the next steps agencies. Enormous salaries, however, are being paid to people who are failing to deliver those services. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that the awards that people are giving to themselves in some privatised industries are odious and obscene. Executives in the water industry are paying themselves enormous sums of money, as are those in the gas and electricity industries. Those people have been provided with monopolies by the state, and they are dipping their snouts into the trough of those monopolies to give themselves huge salary payments and other perquisites.

A large number of executives in the next steps agencies receive salaries that are way beyond the salaries of the civil servants who did their jobs before. After months of trying to get information on this matter, I have obtained some of it. I shall give just one example, but I could give the House dozens. The chief executive of the Defence Research Agency is being paid £147,238. The civil servant who was doing his job before the creation of that agency received £59,020 two years ago. The chief executives of those agencies are paid large sums of money, but that is not the only problem. When the services were within Government Departments, they were part of the Government machine and covered by Government overhead. That is no longer the case.

I received a letter from someone who worked at an agency. He said:

"the 104 Agencies are busily reinventing the wheel. They feel compelled to create their own HQ organisations, often in new buildings at new locations, with their own central support services—statisticians, Press and PR, Personnel, the Chief Executive's own Private Office, Boards of Directors imported from the private sector at private sector salaries, the new House magazine, the expense of trivialities like reprinting all the stationery, paying consultants to design a new logo and so on. The Chief Executive undoubtedly has his own official car, whereas the previous civil service incumbent had to make do with a pool car—if the occasion demanded it."

It is the taxpayer who is paying for those things.

Lady Olga Maitland: I am sure that hon. Members will agree that the right hon. Gentleman's remarks reveal the politics of envy. Does he agree that the sums are more than justified to employ the most capable and able people to run the agencies, bearing in mind the fact that it is largely due to their managerial experience that they are able to cut costs, thus providing money for other services? Am I to understand that the right hon. Gentleman would commit his party to sacking those people and returning to the bad old days?

Mr. Kaufman: I am a humble Back Bencher; I cannot commit my party to anything, but, when my party is returned to office, I shall be pressing my right hon. and hon. Friends to get things done. It is not a question of envy.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) who intervened on the hon. Member for Wantage, mentioned waste. My point is that such salaries are wasteful. We are talking about public money, but public services are not being improved. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) herself has called for the resignation of the Director General of the Prison Service. That agency is not an improvement on what it replaced. The chief executive of the Child Support Agency resigned in despair at her failure, and the agency admitted that 350,000 cases were no longer being pursued.

If the hon. Lady cares to do so, she can see my files, which are full of cases involving poor service by the Benefits Agency and other social security agencies for which the Secretary of State has apologised.

If we were paying more and getting better service, there might be an argument for the increase in expenditure. If we were creating this massive, self-serving, ego-boosting bureaucracy to provide better service, I would not necessarily complain. However, tomorrow morning my constituents will be crowding into my surgery because the services are falling down. More money for better services may be cost-effective; more money for deteriorating services is not—it is an abuse of the taxpayer. I should have thought that the hon. Lady would wish to do something about that.

I am strongly in favour of anything that the citizens charter could do to improve services, but I am today reporting to the House what has been happening in my constituency, which has sent me here to speak for it. My constituents depend to a disproportionately large extent, compared to the national average, on public services, but they are not getting the services they require, which they have a right to expect. I hope that the citizens charter will improve that. If not, I hope that a new Government will.

12.4 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I was heartened by the opening speech of my right hon. Friend the

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. His commitment and determination to see an improvement in public services were well demonstrated. I am sure that we are all grateful that such a man is responsible for these matters.

A key figure in the battle to improve services to the public is Mr. Reid, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, otherwise known as the ombudsman. I am privileged to sit on the Select Committee that monitors his work, and I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate him and his staff, and also Mrs. McIvor and her staff, who are his counterparts in Northern Ireland, on their excellent work.

The Select Committee's recent report on maladministration and redress was referred to by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. I shall deal with it later, but I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend acknowledge its arrival and its importance.

Since the ombudsman's post was first established, the ombudsman has been seen as the ultimate arbiter on public services. To a great extent, his value lies in his uniqueness. I am concerned about the proliferation of ombudsmen—like the dragon's teeth or the story of the sorcerer's apprentice, they seem to be spawning everywhere. There is a grave danger that the ombudsman's role will be devalued. There could be confusion about who the ombudsmen are, how many there are and what their purpose is.

It is not only the function but the name of the ombudsman that is important. We should guard the name jealously and be careful about how we use it and how we allow others to use it. If there is to be more than one ombudsman—that is already the case—it is important that they are seen to be wholly independent. It is no use having an ombudsman for a particular industry or service who is linked in any way to that industry or service. That would without doubt contaminate his work and devalue it.

In the context of the Parliamentary Commissioner, I deal now with the question of the "MP filter". We cannot debate it at great length now, because our debate is mainly about the citizens charter and charter standards. Some people believe that the public should have open access to the Parliamentary Commissioner—or ombudsman—but I cannot agree with that.

One of the briefs relating to today's debate was issued by the Consumers Association. It states that a Member of Parliament can be an "unnecessary obstacle" to complaints being dealt with. I agree with the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) about the essential role of the Member of Parliament. I believe in the direct relationship between a constituent and his Member of Parliament in getting complaints resolved. The Consumers Association's comment reveals a misunderstanding of the present system. I am not suggesting that the system is perfect but, by and large, it works very well.

I do not have time to go into detail now, but I believe that to give direct access to the ombudsman would not only change for the worse the relationship between Members of Parliament and their constituents, but could possibly swamp the ombudsman's office and greatly affect the way in which he does his work.

It is important that, when a complaint is upheld, redress should be immediate. It has been said that justice delayed is justice denied; that is entirely true. Investigations, by their very nature, undertaken by the ombudsman or by any other body, must be detailed and lengthy. When the conclusions have finally been drawn and maladministration has been proved, there is no excuse for any delay in reparation.

Too often, public servants haggle and drag their feet, and are reluctant to admit fault, even after the ombudsman has found them at fault. Sometimes all that is necessary is a simple apology; sometimes something more complicated and expensive is required. Sometimes the redress can be quite simple, and it is wrong that there should be any delay.

In its introduction to the report, the Select Committee says:

"The Citizen's Charter in 1991 promised 'better redress for the citizen when things go wrong.' But in recent years reports of the Ombudsman and evidence taken by this Committee have revealed the inadequacy of much of the redress offered by departments and agencies. We have come across unwillingness to admit fault, refusal to apologise, failure to identify and compensate all those affected by maladministration."

In the conclusion to the report, we say:

"In previous reports we have stressed the need for effective complaints systems in the public service. But complaint is not an end in itself. The test of all recent government insistence on the importance of the citizen is the quality of the redress offered when things go wrong. Our Report proposes both the underlying principles of redress which must inform future actions and specific reforms to practice. It is time to end the grudging and defensive culture so evident in current Guidance to departments. A system of redress which is both prudent and fair, which acknowledges mistakes, makes amends, and improves services, is one to be welcomed not only by the citizen but also by Whitehall."

We must learn from complaints. Having dealt with our complaints, we must use them to improve our services. If we fail to do that, all that we shall create is a burgeoning complaints industry and little improvement. That is why it is important that the suggestions and recommendations in the report should be acted on.

I strongly believe that the citizens charter is a good idea. I believe that it has led to significant improvements, so I hope that any criticisms I make will be seen as constructive.

Any guarantee or assurance is only as good as the integrity of the authority giving it, and its ability and willingness to stand by its word. The House will remember a politician who came back from Europe waving a piece of paper and declaring, "Peace in our time." We all know how worth while that assurance proved. In a more trivial way, if one buys a Rolex Oyster for a few pence in an eastern bazaar, one would not put a great deal of credence on any guarantee that came with it.

In trying to improve standards in public services, charters, structures and codes of practice are all, obviously, extremely important and have their place, but by far the most important factors in providing that service are the qualities of leadership and responsibility shown by those in charge of them, and the way in which those qualities have their effect throughout the service. Individual responsibility—both at the top and throughout the whole organisation—and team work are vital.

I now pick up on two points made by the right hon. Member for Gorton and by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who talked about next steps agencies, which may or may not in the fulness of time prove to be the answers to all these complex problems. I am not too sure about that. My hon. Friend the Member for Wantage made the point that a Minister cannot be

[Mr. Michael Lord]

responsible for every dropped bedpan. The right hon. Member for Gorton referred to the rather more topical question of escaped prisoners. Clearly it is not possible for any Minister to be entirely responsible for every little detail of the running of any service.

My point does not necessarily apply to the current incidents; it applies to a matter of principle—and not just to the present Government, but to all Governments. Perhaps all Ministers should spend a little more time out in the country seeing precisely for themselves what is going on. I know that they do that at present, and I know that they are very busy men. I believe, however, that they should spend more time having a look for themselves at exactly what is going on, and that they should then go back to their offices to deal with it. They should rely rather less on managers between themselves and their constituents.

Although I do not go quite as far as the right hon. Member for Gorton in his condemnation of the recent salary rises for people running public services, I agree very much with the thoughts of my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage. Many of the recent increases have been unwarranted, and have done a great deal of damage to the services that these people purport to serve.

A Minister said not long ago about the health service that complaints should be "jewels to be treasured". That phrase has been quoted to my Select Committee on a number of occasions. I understand and sympathise with what was meant when the phrase was coined. It means that patients in our hospitals should not be afraid to complain if they are not getting the treatment they think they deserve.

I have two points on that subject. First, how realistic is it for us to expect that any patient, while receiving treatment, will complain to those who are supplying the treatment? My experience as a Member of Parliament and with my family leads me to believe that it will be a rare occasion when a patient undergoing treatment complains.

There are all sorts of obvious reasons for that. Patients may feel that complaints may affect the way in which they get the treatment. They often feel that the health service must know best, so they are reluctant to complain in the first place. We are probably mistaken if we believe that a patient will complain while receiving treatment. It is true to say that confidence is a large part of any treatment in the health service. If a patient has got to the stage where he feels he must complain, some damage has already been done.

Secondly, the other danger with treating complaints as jewels to be treasured is that, if we are not careful, we shall almost be at the stage where complaints are considered to be not a bad thing. There is a fine line between people being afraid to complain and those to whom they are complaining not worrying about the complaint being made. We do not want a situation in which, the more complaints we get, the better. That would be rather silly; in fact, it sounds silly when I say it. It is an "Alice in Wonderland" scenario. We should say that people should not be afraid to complain, but that we should aim at giving them far less reason to make a complaint in the first place.

I now turn to two of my pet topics. One is a pet aversion and one is my favourite hobby horse. My pet aversion, which has been borne in on me more and more as I have served on the Select Committee, is jargon. Almost all the problems we see, especially those relating to the health service, come from jargon or from communications in one way or another. There has been a spawning of pseudo-commercial job titles and acronyms so that, unless one is part of the small, tightly knit group of professionals, one does not really understand what on earth people are talking about. Those intimately involved understand, but the general public, of course, do not.

One of my famous stories—I suspect that I may have already mentioned it in the House—is that of the role of a line manager. On one occasion in Committee, I was quizzing someone about that. As I went down in the lift after the Committee, the policeman who normally sits in the Committee went down with me. He told me how pleased he was that I had made a point about jargon and the job title of line manager. As we went down in the lift, the constable said to me, "You know, Sir, I have a line manager now. I used to call him my sergeant."

In some ways, that sums up the whole situation. Imagine any member of the public going to the police station and saying "Excuse me constable, I do not want you. I would like to see your line manager." It is nonsense. We want to talk about nurses, sisters and doctors.

In a moment, I shall come to my favourite topic: matrons. My final example of jargon is from a recent Committee sitting. One of the witnesses said that he had "two providers" in his constituency. When questioned in more detail, he said that he was talking about hospitals. What member of the general public would understand somebody talking about two providers in their constituency? I explained that to him, and I thought that he saw its wisdom. I hope that, from that day, he has called them hospitals and not providers.

Now I shall link everything together. I hope that I have conveyed to the House that leadership, individual responsibility and communication are more important in the long term than the charters and the structures. I am not saying that the charters, structures and codes are not important, but, at the end of the day, to deliver proper public service, we need leadership and, individual responsibility. Care, teamwork and all such attributes are important too, but it comes down to the individual.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will deal with the question of the individual in great detail. The individual that I would like to see reinstated is the matron.

I honestly believe that it was the worst day's work ever done when the role of matron was removed from the health service. In 1988, I put down an early-day motion and 129 people signed it. That early-day motion said:

"That this House believes that the only person in the history of the hospital service who was able to deal with consultants and doctors, understand nurses and patients and at the same time keep a careful eye on morale and efficiency was the Matron; and urges the re-introduction of this indispensable post as a matter of urgency."

Since then, some hospitals have reinstated the post. Guy's hospital in 1991 was one of them.

Nothing in my experience encapsulates more the gulf between so-called experts and ordinary people, doctors, nurses and patients than the reaction one gets when one says that we should reintroduce matrons. From the experts one gets a slightly cynical smile. They have seen it all before. They do not mind paying a little lip service, but they do not really want it to happen.

All the other people who deliver the service say "Yes, please. Why not do it as soon as possible?" I very much hope that my hon. Friend will give me the assurance that he will not only pay lip service to the idea, but that the Government see the value of matrons and that they will recommend to every hospital in the land that they reintroduce that post.

12.23 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): It is interesting to reflect that the two brief speeches in the debate so far have come, commendably, from two members of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord). I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) is also a member of that Committee. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is a member of another Committee."] Then my hon. Friend was referring to another Select Committee. At least it showed distinguished Committee members of two different Select Committees giving us a good example.

Perhaps there should be a citizens charter for Members of Parliament on the length of speeches, especially on Fridays. I know that there were many interventions and one must make full allowance for that, but I think that I am right in saying that the two Front-Bench speeches took one hour and 35 minutes. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who has just left—I shall tell him that I have referred to him, because he may miss my remarks, although that may not be a particular loss on his part—also took an exceedingly long time to tell us something that rather shocked and surprised me. He does not seem to be doing his job very well as a Member of Parliament in dealing with local problems. I was absolutely amazed that he seemed to be having such trouble in getting responses promptly from various different bodies, institutions and agencies.

Mr. David Shaw: He did not have a telephone directory.

Mr. Dykes: That news was so shocking that I did not know quite how to respond to it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his sedentary intervention, with the permission of the Chair.

Certainly, I have not had the experience of having trouble getting responses. It is one of the great attractions of the structural changes in policy. More flexible, more tangible, more approachable bodies for dealing with the problems facing citizens at local and national levels mean that the accountability is more easily identifiable, or should be, if those institutions and bodies are properly run. I hope that, although we are in the early days of this change in policy, which is welcome, we will insist collectively, as parliamentarians of all parties, on that accountability.

I could be wrong; perhaps the right hon. Member for Gorton is justified in his complaints about the particular distressing examples that he mentioned. I have my doubts, because in my area there are bodies similar to some that he mentioned. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is my local colleague in the borough of Harrow, he will be able to confirm—in fact in an intervention he did, at least tangentially—that we would not accept the tardiness of those responses or the attempt to deny logical accountability. However, I have certainly not experienced that myself.

I make allowance for the fact that, for one reason or another historically, there may be greater difficulties in the inner-city areas in the north in providing high-quality services than there are generally in the outer London suburbs. That is not so true nowadays. The pressure on public finances affects every local authority area, almost irrespective of whether they are in the north or the south and regardless of topography, geography and characteristics. The citizens charter therefore acquires an even greater importance. I am very glad that we are having a full day's debate on it.

I intend to be brief because time is passing and I have already referred to the excessively long speeches of others. I shall make a few important and telling points. It is still early days. It is not an excuse for the Government and their supporters to say that more time is needed to change the culture and attitude of public officials towards members of the public.

I agreed with the right hon. Member for Gorton when he objected to the use of the word "customer". I particularly object to the use of that word by British Rail. It is part of the trendy jargon of the modern age. My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central seemed to be making a light point about the problems of jargon. I believe that he actually made an extremely profound point. He concentrated, quite rightly, on the medical world where it is crucial that patients or their families and friends should understand what is said by medical practitioners, advisers and staff in hospitals who, in the old days, often regarded patients as a nuisance.

If my memory serves me correctly, I believe that a new version of the patients charter is to be published shortly. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will refer to that when he replies to the debate. It is very important that we implant this new culture deeply in society. The Labour party is embarrassed and grudging about the citizens charter because Labour knows that the charter, which was launched under the personal auspices of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister three and a half years ago, is becoming increasingly popular.

Thanks to the citizens charter, a change in attitudes will permeate our society. The public will wake up to the charter. I did not think that it was depressing that only 35 per cent. of people in the opinion poll said that they could remember having seen documentation about the citizens charter. That is a very high figure for the early days of what could be a massive change in our culture, if we achieve the right results.

We must bear in mind the acute pressure at the margins on public finances. That is a worrying problem for all Members of Parliament. I am aware of that problem at my surgery. Because of the economic and financial pressure in recent years, I have become aware, for the first time, that even Members of Parliament do not have the financial and other wherewithal to achieve results promptly for our constituents when they come to our surgeries—and between surgeries and through telephone calls and correspondence—with their problems.

It is crucial to implant the culture correctly despite the financial weakness as the demands for services rise and resources are inevitably limited. Many taxpayers want them to be limited because they want to make their own choices in the private sector, instead of simply relying on the faceless bureaucrats who provided services in the old days at the margin. We must ensure that the citizens charter general programme in respect of the key zones of

[Mr. Dykes]

activity is not just a public relations exercise. It is not a public relations exercise now and it has not been such an exercise in the three years since its conception. The danger is that cynicism among the public might return in future.

I have a specific and practical example of something that can be intensely irritating. I accept that we are still only in the early stages, so I have reached only a preliminary judgment on the matter. If resources are under severe pressure in a body or agency, it will resort increasingly—as is already happening—to the dreadful syndrome of the answerphone instead of having someone answer telephone inquiries.

At least the answerphone provides a response. Answerphone messages are often extremely detailed and helpful. However, we can imagine what might happen if that practice is carried too far. We will live in a world of answerphone messages about how to write in to apply for information or a service. A citizen who may or may not be aggrieved may call for the first time, and then be frustrated.

With regard to British Rail's obsession with making announcements, it is possible to go too far the other way in terms of live announcements on trains and elsewhere. It is possible to over-announce, particularly when there are problems and train delays. I note that recently drivers have been told that it is very good customer service to keep people in touch with what is happening. However, when I travelled on the District line from the City to Westminster recently, the driver triumphantly announced, "This train is subjected to what is probably a severe delay." His announcement inevitably caused dismay because his use of words was so unskilled. I criticise motor men and motor women—if there are any—on London Underground reluctantly, because they are doing a marvellous job. The train driver's words caused a collapse in the morale of the passengers, although he was probably not aware of that. It would have been more encouraging if he had said, "I shall let you know what is happening as soon as we get moving in a few minutes time."

That may seem to be trivial, but it is very important in view of the natural and justified insistence of the public for better services in general. I am glad that the Government have launched the programme and that they are building on it and developing it for the future. I am pleased that they are going to give us regular reports.

We all pay our respects, and offer sympathy to, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I am glad that, as a senior and talented member of the Cabinet, he is in charge of the policy. I am pleased that he is ably aided and abetted by my local colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Cynicism is an important part of the politician's general panoply of aids or disadvantages. We were probably quite cynical when the programme was first launched more than three years ago. As it has filtered through society, it is being taken very seriously—*[Interruption.]* I am not suggesting that all aspects of physical technology should be taken to the point of my hon. Friend the Minister wearing his pager on the Front Bench. We are bound to be very impressed by that and I noticed that it went off several times today. I shall be fascinated to learn later where the message came from. [HON. MEMBERS: "Railtrack."] I thank my hon. Friends for the prompting.

I hope that it does not sound too frivolous—I shall not say who it was—but one of my ultra-far right colleagues, a very congenial colleague, was very crestfallen some months ago when we were discussing the British Rail privatisation. I had to say to him that we had done very careful research and questioned people at the Centre for Policy Studies but that we had not been able to work out a way to enable one train to overtake another on the same track. He knew that it was subversive of me to say that, but it was definitely true and there was nothing that we could do about it.

I suppose that the message is that there must always be a balance in policy, and that is very important from the point of view of the modern Conservative party—which is rightly beginning to resist the old temptation of a few years ago to say that everything in the public service was wrong and badly run and that everything in the private sector was sacred and wonderful.

In the context of the private sector, I share people's misgivings about excessive executive salary packages compared with what is happening on the shop floor and the unfairness thereof, which produces acid reactions in the pubs and clubs of this country and which is ignored at the peril of Conservative Members. We really cannot say, "This matter has nothing to do with the Government; it is to do only with the free market." I cannot understand why so many chief executives get away with the absurd nonsense that they have to pay themselves more and more greedy quantities of money in order to compete in the international marketplace and that the electricians on the shop floor of their factories should depress their own wages to be more competitive. That seems to be a straight contradiction.

I know that that is not a direct part of the citizens charter service, but if we impose too excessive a system of control of complaint on the public sector and let the private sector, particularly where strong monopolies are involved, get away with poor services, it is totally inadequate to say, "That is just a free market phenomenon; it is up to shareholders to make sure that a company is properly run."

Apart from echoing the fervent, almost hysterical plea that the Government have proper discipline in respect of motorway cones—I do not accept that the position is other than a marginal improvement on what we were promised a long time ago; far too often we now see motorway signs saying, "These cones are here for safety reasons" on a much too long stretch of road—my final comment is in respect of education and schools. I too welcome the publication of examination results and performance figures for schools and the annual report system. It is in its shaky, early stages and lots of mistakes are being made—we might as well acknowledge that; it is no shame for the Government to acknowledge that that is so—but it goes hand in hand with my plea, forensically and politically as well as socially and in human terms, for the Government to agree to a long period of peace, stability and cohesion in our grant-maintained schools. They need it—they have had many upheavals in recent years—the teachers need it and, above all, the pupils need it; but the parents do as well, even if they have access to greater information, which I warmly welcome.

12.37 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I welcome the opportunity to make what I hope, in view of the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), will be a brief contribution.

I warmly welcome this timely debate. It is right that the House should debate such an important, wide-ranging subject. I should like to shift the focus of attention on to a matter that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster raised—standards, which are the key to the citizens charter.

It is a privilege to take part in the debate, having heard the very distinguished overview of the citizens charter by my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson). I can understand the avenues along which he took the debate. Standards lie at the heart of the citizens charter.

The citizens charter is part of the drive to improve standards of the past 15 years. It is certainly in keeping with the drive to improve standards through greater competition, privatisation, the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering, market testing central Government functions and all the other reforms that have taken place. The citizens charter, when it was proposed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister three and a half years ago, was a valuable addition to the reforms that had already emphasised standards. The scheme was introduced in the right way as a wide-ranging measure with 30 charters proposed. There are now about 40 charters.

It was right to introduce the scheme in such a comprehensive way because it enabled a general standard to be set across a wide range of Government endeavour, and it gave users of services a general idea of the standards that they could expect across a range of services. Those included the right to more information, the right to make a complaint, the right to receive service with a good attitude from staff and so on. Those ideas are not always quantifiable across such a wide range of services. Users of services have come increasingly to expect that they should receive service in various fields according to those standards.

The scheme is also valuable for the providers of services. I use the word "providers" subject to the strictures that have just been given about it. I do not use the word as jargon, but in a more general sense to refer to all those who are responsible for the delivery of services to the public. The scheme is valuable for them too as they have the benefit of a standard to aim for.

We have heard a great deal in the debate about morale and the ethos of public service. The citizens charter contributes to the ethos of public service because it gives public servants a standard to aim for. They can have satisfaction in their public service in knowing that they have achieved a high standard.

The charter mark is an excellent complementary idea to the citizens charter. It has been a growing success, and more and more organisations have applied for it every year. There are 98 recipients of the charter mark this year, and many more applied for it. The receivers of services should have the right to nominate organisations for the charter mark.

The citizens charter has the effect of giving the providers of services an even higher standard to work towards. It is a way not just of measuring standards but of driving them up. The patients charter, about which we have heard a good deal this morning, is a good example of that, and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) drew attention to it. The way in which the patients charter has evolved—with higher standards to the benefit of patients being built into it—gives a good example.

The patients charter began by consolidating a number of existing rights for health service patients and created some important new rights. One of those was the right to have guaranteed admission from a waiting list within a period of two years. That was the situation when the charter was first issued in 1991. The health service has worked to improve on that and, in the charter to be issued this month, the standard will be revised to 18 months. I understand that my local health authority of Hertfordshire has set itself an even lower target, and is now working towards a guaranteed admission time of 12 months. That is generally being achieved throughout Hertfordshire.

The debate about waiting time was interesting, because it gave an example of how the citizens charter can help to drive up standards. The focus of the debate from the Opposition—it is up to the Opposition to criticise—shifted from the guaranteed maximum waiting time to the average waiting time. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North said that, although maximum times had come down, more people were waiting longer for other operations. That is not borne out by evidence from across the country, which suggests that the average waiting time has been going down in the same period as the guaranteed maximum waiting time has also been reduced.

The average waiting time in the past four years has gone down from just over eight months to just over four months. In Hertfordshire, the picture is even better. It has achieved a reduction to just over three months for the average waiting time. That considerable success is a tribute to the health authority and the hospitals in Hertfordshire.

The Opposition argument moves on from there. They say that it is all very well that people are receiving more prompt treatment once they are on a waiting list, but what about the time that it takes people to get on a waiting list? Their new focus is the time it takes from a patient seeing his GP to receiving an out-patient appointment with a consultant. It is right that the question should be asked. I welcome the fact that one of the new targets being set in the patients charter this month is to make that specific target part of the charter and to measure the length of time that it takes to go from a general practitioner to an appointment with a consultant in out-patients.

It is right for the Opposition to ask such questions, but they would do better if they said not only that something should be a target but gave us some idea of how they would achieve it. That is the difficult part. Such ideas from the Opposition have been rather thin throughout the debate. Although the Opposition have given a commitment to the citizens charter, which we welcome, we have heard little from them about their ideas for improving the charter or delivery of the standards which are expected under it.

The parents charter is important for citizens. It has been a great success and it has certainly gone with the grain of the reforms that have taken place in education in the past 15 years, and especially since 1988. Parents have been given more responsibility, more opportunity to exercise choice and more decision-making powers in schools. Since the Education Reform Act 1988 was passed, we

[Mr. James Clappison]

have seen a devolution of power from local authorities to schools through local management of schools and grant-maintained status, where schools have opted for it.

The citizens charter sets out some admirable targets for schools to achieve. It sets out the standards to be achieved by pupils. It requires schools to allow parents to see whether they have been achieved by providing more information, establishing school performance tables and providing more information about truancy levels, length of taught time and so on. It is important that parents should have that information and should be able to assess the school and where it is not doing a sufficiently good job. Parents should have the opportunities that they have been given by our reforms to put things right.

I said that the trick for the Opposition was to say how they would improve the pattern of reform. We heard little about that today. One proposal that the Opposition have suggested as a way forward is the creation of more government. They emphasise not better government but more government. We heard yesterday the proposal for regional authorities in England and Wales to go together with Labour's policy of devolution for Scotland. There may be some demand for such authorities in other parts of England—I doubt it—but there is certainly not much demand for them in Hertfordshire.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North is no longer here. One of his colleagues yesterday called for a north of England assembly. Hon. Members may call for it in the House, but I doubt that it is the talk of the pubs and clubs of Newcastle. I doubt that people have stopped talking about football and transfers and have suddenly spontaneously demanded a regional assembly. If, in the present circumstances, Newcastle were put in the same regional assembly as Manchester there would probably be a revolution.

Newcastle has a distinctive local identity and proud tradition; Hertfordshire has no less a proud identity. There is certainly no demand whatever in Hertfordshire for a regional assembly to deliver higher standards in government. This week we have seen the publication of the Local Government Commission report on the future of local government in Hertfordshire. It has proposed the retention of the two-tier system of county and district councils. If the commission had asked when it carried out its research whether people wanted a regional government on top of that system, the answer would have been a resounding no.

In Hertfordshire a regional authority would be a third or fourth level of government. We would have parish councils in some parts of the county, district councils, a county council and a regional council.

For Hertfordshire, not the least of the problems of having a regional council would be knowing in which part of the region to put it. Would it be put in an eastern region, possibly centred on Norwich, an east midlands region centred on Nottingham, or a south-east region along with Sussex and Kent? Hertfordshire's local identity would not be supported by its inclusion in any of those regions or the creation of any other conceivable region.

The people of Hertfordshire feel that they are part of the home counties. Hertfordshire is close to London, which apparently will have its own extra layer of government. There is certainly no demand or belief in Hertfordshire that higher standards would be delivered through regional government.

Perhaps the most ironic part of Labour's proposal is the inclusion of education as one of the responsibilities of the new regional councils. That must seem strange to parents in my constituency, so many of whom opted for grant-maintained schools for their children. A clear majority of secondary schools and an increasing number of primary and middle schools have opted to go grant maintained. Apparently the parents involved are members of the quangos denounced by the Labour party. Grant-maintained schools contribute to the Labour party's quango count, but the parents and governors involved do not think that they are part of a quango. It must seem strange to them that, in the name of devolution, power and decision making are to be taken away from their schools when the overwhelming majority of parents in Hertfordshire opted for grant-maintained status. Power will be taken away from those schools and handed upwards to a remote regional assembly, even beyond the county council, which has sometimes been said to be a little remote. That is not the way forward, or the way to achieve higher standards.

The emphasis that the Government have placed, through the citizens charter, on achieving higher standards within existing levels of government and the increasing number of functions that it undertakes within one society, is the right way forward. There is no excuse, in this day and age, for citizens to receive a second-rate service from the Government and any of the functions that they provide. The citizens charter is an extremely important step forward and it is right that we should be having this debate. We should keep the focus of the debate on higher standards.

Public service is important, but I do not remember the 1960s and 1970s as being the golden years for public services that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) claimed. His example was British Telecom, but the telephone service was an especially bad example of public service during that period. I speak as one who can remember finding telephone box after telephone box out of order and all the rest—the failure to install telephones, high prices and the provision of few additional services. It was not a good example and there are precious few other examples of public services operating better in the 1960s and 1970s than they do now.

We needed the 1979 revolution to bring about higher standards and we are continuing that revolution through the citizens charter. I look forward to the charter evolving in the years to come and being the focus for ever-improving public services.

12.53 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I have listened to the entire debate with great interest. There have been some heavyweight and very interesting contributions on a subject that is important for the efficiency of Government and the public sector and for the consumer—the average citizen—in terms of provision.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for the work and the expertise that he has put into the development of the citizens charter, and for the comprehensive analysis he gave us today of its progress and development.

I also compliment the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). Although I did not agree with his entire contribution, he was not grudging in accepting the benefits of the citizens charter, and rightly said that he would accept and praise it if it worked. We all agree on that. Ample evidence shows that it is working, but it is a long-term project over at least 10 years. It is therefore right that we judge it by its results as they develop.

I was also interested in the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The emphasis that he placed on the responsibilities of hon. Members and the peculiar but detailed knowledge we gain of the operation of public services is a valid element in this debate.

Most significant, however, is the lack of contribution from the Liberal Democratic party, due to the complete absence of Liberal Members at any stage in the debate. It was not even represented by one Member for five minutes at the beginning of the debate. That is typical of that party, which claims to place great emphasis on helping individual citizens, case work and what is often called the drains and pavements, yet when there is a major debate on an element of that, no Liberal Democrat Member is present for even a minute.

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the absence of the Liberal Democratic party today shows clearly that, far from introducing a general charter on how hon. Members should carry out their business, it is incumbent on the Liberal Democrats to introduce a charter on how all citizens can monitor Liberal Democrat Members on how they carry out their work. Their absence today shows their clear lack of understanding of what the country is about and how democracy works in this country.

Mr. Merchant: My hon. Friend is right: if we were awarding charter marks, none would go to Liberal Democrat Members. Their interest in the problems of the citizen is bogus, and always has been. They make claims in their newsletters about what they have done, but in reality they do nothing. To the extent that citizens believe those claims, they are being conned, although they are beginning to see through them now.

The citizens charter has represented a step change in the modern relationship between individual and state. It is, therefore, not just about the practical advantages, which have been ably highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy and others this morning. It is not just a convenient administrative mechanism to deal more effectively with complaints from individuals; it is certainly not a minor attempt to put a friendly face on the Goliath of bureaucracy and big organisation; nor is it a publicity gimmick simply to give the impression that action is being taken to deal with service failings. All the facts available show that it is much more than any of those. It is a bold, significant and long-term effort to empower the individual, and thus redress the balance between citizen and state.

Naturally, the citizens charter alone will not achieve that aim. It must be done alongside many other developments in the modern relationship between state, Government and individual, but it is an important part of that process. As such, it is more than just a political initiative or a temporary phenomenon of Government. It represents a philosophical statement and is based firmly on Conservative principles.

Thus, the citizens charter stresses the primacy of the individual; the limited powers and accountability of the state; the Government's role as servant, not master; and, above all, the direct accountability of institutions to those who use them, and of bureaucracies to those for whom they are designed to provide.

The citizens charter is also about the market, in the sense of contracts freely entered into between consumers and providers of services. It relates to the right of consumers to assert their own powers as equal partners in a mutually agreed arrangement. In some instances, the nature of the parties to a contract—the individual and perhaps a large state-run organisation—leads to an imbalance. In that event, the citizens charter becomes an important part of the relationship by helping to achieve a much better balance.

The charter is not a substitute or a prop for competition or for enterprise, and it should not be so interpreted. It is certainly not a watering down of those two ideals. Nor is it an attempt to regulate because the market cannot or because it has failed. On the contrary, I see it as an extension of the two ideals. It is an extension of the values which drive the market. It has been initiated to bridge the gap that arises when the market is, in certain areas, as yet imperfect. It could be argued that, in some sectors, the market is unable to operate perfectly. We are talking of areas in which consumers cannot expect to be able to exercise their powers.

The ultimate power of the consumer, of course, is to withdraw sponsorship of the organisation providing the service. That can be done in a perfect or near-perfect market in which there are many alternative providers to which to turn. In those circumstances, consumers can vote with their feet by going to or away from a provider. That is a tremendous power, especially when it is exercised by many consumers. It cannot be exercised, however, when there is a monopoly or near-monopoly, or when a specific service is provided by the state. That is where the balance has had to be addressed.

The citizens charter runs easily alongside two other mainstream initiatives that have similar aims and need to be seen as part of a partnership with the charter in achieving the same objectives. I refer to privatisation and competitive tendering. The empowerment of the citizens charter provides a third force to supplement the two earlier initiatives, which were so successful in the 1980s. Indeed, they continue to be successful in extending the rights of the citizen.

I have talked so far about the ethical side of the citizens charter and the driving ideas behind it. All three of the parts I have mentioned are of course based on a practical responsibility and practical benefits. There is a flow of practical benefits, because motivation matches human nature. Privatisation and competitive tendering have delivered tremendous benefits because they, too, appeal to basic instincts in human nature. The 40 or so charters that have been established so far are doing the same.

It is not to be said that charters are needed everywhere. It could well be argued that the economy and society operate best where they are not needed, in areas where the market is operating well. We can make comparisons

[Mr. Merchant]

between the quality of service provided by the private sector when it is operating at its best in the market and the dead hand of centralisation and the state.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) talked about the appallingly poor-quality telephone service in the 1960s and 1970s. I remember that only too well.

There are other examples. The gas industry used to have a terrible reputation for bad consumer relationships, poor service and high prices. Many years ago, when I was on a regional newspaper, we set up a small department called Action Desk, designed to help members of the public who phoned in with complaints about services. Within a few weeks, Action Desk was overflowing with complaints about Northern Gas from consumers in the north-east of England. They complained about its appalling service; how it was always promising to call, but never turned up; how, when its workmen did turn up, they did not know what they were supposed to do, or what they did went wrong; or how they had ordered a gas cooker but it had not been delivered.

We do not hear complaints about the gas industry today. I can honestly say that, since I was elected in 1992, I have not received a single complaint from a constituent about the gas industry. I am not suggesting that mistakes are never made, but there is no doubt that there is a fundamental contrast between the gas industry under state monopoly according to the ethos of the time and the gas industry as it operates today.

I am not a great traveller, but I have been to the USA, where sometimes the enterprise culture operates in its most unrestrained from. That is not a criticism, because that often means the highest standards of service imaginable. It is quite astounding. One could go into what appears to be a tuppeny-ha'penny, down-market hamburger joint and be almost embarrassed by the attentions of the girl on the other side of the counter. Staff say, "Have a good day," every 10 seconds.

Of course, that would not go down so well in this country, and I certainly would not expect it when I call at the ticket office at my local station. However, it demonstrates a system whose culture drives consumer awareness, high quality, politeness and a desire to excel. That results in a high-quality service for the consumer.

That process goes even further in the far east. Not only are we wished a nice day—although not in such an impeccable accent—we get a bow as well. I certainly do not expect to be bowed at when I go to my local ticket office, but I am glad to say that, when I ask its personnel when the next train is due, I no longer get the reply, "Don't know, mate," or when I ask, "Will the service be put right by tomorrow?", the reply, "Don't know that, either."

I now receive a polite and, as far as possible, well-informed reply. That has not always been provided by British Rail; it has happened because of the greater awareness of the need to look after the consumer and to treat him as the number one person in a contract, rather than providing a service only from the point of view of the supplier. The balance has been redressed.

The citizens charter can be simply tested in the long term as it develops. We can ask a number of questions. Does it improve the various services on offer? To a large extent, that is measurable. Does it give the public the necessary weapon with which to fight? Does it provide information on what the public should be entitled to receive? Does it provide the openness that gives them the means by which to register their complaints? Does it enforce accountability and, at the end of the day, provide redress? Great steps forward have been taken in all those matters.

The question about the improvement of standards is the more difficult to answer. Comparative statistics can be compiled and monitored year after year, but one can be assured that standards have firmly improved in the long term, rather than that they are just experiencing a beneficial blip, only as the months and years go past.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Does he agree that an improvement is more likely where a standard has been set? Is it not just as important, however, that the standard has been defined so that everyone will know whether it is being achieved? Surely that is an important and brave step for a Government or organisation to take, as it leaves them open to criticism if they do not achieve the standard. Defining a standard is a brave step to take.

Mr. Merchant: I agree with my hon. Friend. Setting out the essential, basic standard to begin with might perhaps strike us as obvious, but it did not happen before. In many of the services, one had no idea what one was entitled to receive because the culture was very much a suppliers' culture. They used to say, "We are here to provide a service. We decide what that service is, and we are not even going to tell you what it is." My hon. Friend is correct.

I shall return to that issue, but I was answering my first question about improving standards of service and whether such improvements are measurable. The answer is a qualified yes. There have been improvements, and they are measurable, which is excellent, but it is too early—it is no one's fault; it is in the nature of things—to say how significant the improvement has been. That is where I agree with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North that in that respect the citizens charter is to be welcomed but that we must to an extent suspend judgment and consider it again in the years to come to ensure that it is improving services in a significant way.

The second question involved having the necessary weapons—information and openness—with which to fight problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere was correct in his intervention. There has been a significant change. We have clear, published targets and levels of service which the public increasingly know about—the information is readily available. We therefore know the service level that we are entitled to receive and the public can measure their experience of what is happening against the targets that are set.

There is a dual approach. Members of the public can consider the targets and say, "They are not good enough. We want them to be improved." They can argue on that basis. They can also consider the targets, compare them with reality, ask why the organisation is not meeting them and put pressure on it to improve. Openness in Government, local government and the big services is an important part of that. Openness is part of an essential process. The individual must have access to it to obtain the information necessary to test and to judge.

My last question was: does the citizens charter enforce accountability and redress? That is perhaps the easiest of the questions to measure. All one has to do is consider the detail of the charters, or the equivalent if an organisation does not have a charter, and ask whether a ready and well-known system exists to ensure accountability and to obtain redress. Is it obvious who one complains to and how one complains? Is there a complaint system? If so, what happens when one complains? Does it work? Does the system operate efficiently and quickly? Is there some form of redress?

Redress need not necessarily be financial, although in some matters that is important and useful. Redress can be offered through apologies and explanations, which will often satisfy the citizen. If a citizen knows that he is being listened to and that there is a means of complaining, he will be satisfied even if, at the end of the day, he receives only an apology. It is only when he comes up against the brick wall of old-fashioned bureaucracy that he becomes frustrated.

Mr. Deva: Does my hon. Friend agree that the citizens charter was timely, in that it coincided with the ethos of the liberalised and deregulated market that we have created? It is timely because, as my hon. Friend said, we wanted to offer redress and put in place a means of ensuring accountability. At the same time, should we not be careful that we do not create a culture of complaint, or institutionalise a whingeing society?

The reason for the citizens charter was the need to correct what was wrong but, once the target has been achieved, should it not fade away? Once the standard of services has reached the required level, should not complaints decline and disappear? As has happened in other spheres, should we not be wary of creating an entirely new industry of complaint?

Mr. Merchant: That is a very interesting point. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the citizens charter is timely. In the 1980s, the focus was on correcting problems that had arisen over the years with the big nationalised industries which were not working properly. No one was able to make them work properly because, ultimately, the culture was wrong, something that was accepted throughout the world.

The emphasis was on privatisation, competitive tendering and market testing. They were excellent and were seen to work. People generally accepted them, but they then asked what could be done about those sectors which, for one reason or another, could not respond fully to the market or be privatised. Was there a deficiency?

The public rightly thought that it was all very well that British Telecom and British Gas had been put right, but what was to happen to those services or industries that had not, and for which privatisation was not the answer? There was a demand for higher standards of public service provision. In that sense, the citizens charter was timely, because it was an initiative that answered the valid questions that were being asked.

As for my hon. Friend's second point, the culture of complaint is a difficult problem. Having thought about it, I cannot share my hon. Friend's optimism, although I would like to do so. However, I agree that there has been a withering away of complaints in some services—that has clearly been the case in the gas industry. One can overcome and bring about a decline in the number of complaints by putting right the problems about which people were complaining. I hope that he is right to think that we can look back in a decade or so on the withering away of the citizens charter because it has been so effective.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that people will always complain, sometimes without good cause but sometimes with very good cause. I fear that we shall never be able to provide a universally perfect system of provision, whether directly from the state or through various organisations. There will always be deficiencies, so there will always be an element of complaint, and there must be a mechanism to deal with it.

I shall not detain the House for too long, but I have several important points to make. First, I mention some of the direct achievements of charters. Reference has already been made to improvements in health care provision. It is very worth while studying waiting times in the national health system. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere rightly mentioned average waiting time and maximum waiting time. The achievements on maximum waiting time are significant.

In March 1991, 50,000 people had waited more than two years for in-patient treatment. That was quite unacceptable, and should never have happened. In the English regions, there is now no patient who has waited for more than two years. That figure has been brought down considerably, although not entirely, by the citizens charter ideas. The focusing of resources and the reorganisation of the health service have helped to achieve that figure, but an important role has been played by the process that motivates the citizens charter—in other words, an emphasis on the statistics of performance and the need to reach targets.

In education, where the parents charter now applies, the same sort of thing has happened. There are annual written reports on a child's progress, and league tables on performance in schools.

Mr. David Shaw: Introduced by this Government.

Mr. Merchant: Indeed, introduced by this Government. There are also the independent reports by Ofsted. All that has helped to improve the quality of provision, from the point of view both of parents and of pupils.

In transport, especially in rail transport, the targets set for Network SouthEast, Regional Railways and InterCity have been well publicised at all stations. The passenger—the consumer—can easily check not just whether standards are being reached, but that the standards are being increased all the time.

The charter mark has been an important part of the citizens charter initiative. I am glad to hear that it is being extended by giving consumers—the public—the right to nominate. I am pleased to see that, in my London borough of Bromley, two departments, libraries and environmental services, have won charter marks. I also compliment the Labour authority of Lewisham, which is next door to Bromley. Its direct refuse disposal team and its social services planned hospital discharge arrangements have won charter marks.

That shows that it is not just a question of who runs the local authority, but how the departments within it operate. We can all point to local authorities under all political administrations that have some good departments and some very poor departments. We must have a system

[Mr. Merchant]

that jacks up the quality of the poor departments and rewards, in one way or another, the successes of the good departments.

The right hon. Member for Gorton spoke in specific terms about how Members of Parliament are part of the process because, through our casework, we can judge where standards are falling, where standards are improving and how effectively problems are being dealt with. We can see whether there are proper complaints procedures. We can judge the attitudes being shown to the public, and we can get a good feel of the underlying service quality.

The quality is sometimes the result of policy decisions; it can be the result of funding. I am not suggesting that quality of service is purely a matter of attitude and efficiency within the department. There are external factors as well. It is, however, certainly true that we all know from our constituency work where there are problems and where there are attitude problems. I do not know why the right hon. Member for Gorton should have so many problems with Railtrack. I have not had those problems; perhaps he has a regional problem—

Mr. David Shaw: The wrong address.

Mr. Merchant: Perhaps he has the wrong address; I do not know. I compliment him, however, on the effort he puts into the detail of his constituency casework. I try to do the same. Through constituency casework, we can find out exactly where the problems arise.

The right hon. Member spoke about the importance of one-Member constituencies because of the relationship between a Member of Parliament and a constituent. I absolutely agree with him. It is extremely important. It is only right that any constituent should feel that they could go to their Member of Parliament if there is a problem, and that the Member of Parliament could get action to be taken.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, it is not a question of us massaging our egos and saying "Look, we have got a letter from the Minister concerned." It is question of accountability working. It is to my eternal pleasure that I know that I can write to a Minister on any topic within his responsibility and receive a personal letter of reply from that Minister. That is extremely important. However, it concerns me that there are other areas of public activity in which that does not happen.

Mr. Joseph Deva: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again; I know that he has little time. I wanted to draw his attention to another very powerful avenue through which Members of Parliament are able to bring complainants, redress and balance back into the system—the parliamentary ombudsman. I have the privilege of being a member of the Select Committee concerned with such matters. We see cases week after week of very powerful and sometimes quite appalling circumstances, with which we are not only able to deal, as the ombudsman does, but to set a pattern, a methodology, a procedure, to avoid the same thing happening elsewhere.

Mr. Merchant: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is not only a question of redress, but of putting right what may be fundamentally wrong. He is quite right to draw attention to that.

I shall draw my remarks to a close by referring briefly to a few local experiences—not in detail, as the right hon. Member for Gorton did, but in mere headings, to illustrate how the citizens charter is working and to show the areas in which there are still deficiencies. I almost considered awarding my own charter marks to the various organisations with which I deal, so different is the response I get. Some deserve praise and some deserve condemnation. The organisations go across the whole range of activities.

For example, in local government, I have mentioned that the libraries and the environmental services in Bromley have charter marks. My experience of them merits exactly the same award. I have had very few complaints about those departments. Those I have had have been dealt with entirely efficiently and very quickly.

The planning department does not have a charter mark, but it should. In that department, no end of constituency cases are raised because planning is such a sensitive issue in my constituency. Nevertheless, the response of the department is superb. Public concerns are taken on board immediately. Response is extremely fast, thorough and efficient. The engineer's department is similar. There are not so many complaints to the treasury department, but when there are, about wrong billing and so on, again, they are dealt with very efficiently.

However, the education department in the same authority, under the same overall control, does not show the same degree of efficiency. I do not get the same speed of response, the same effectiveness shown, the same concern. It is very much an old-fashioned view of implying "How dare you complain? We are getting on with our job, you get on with yours and don't let our paths cross."

Outside the local authority, I shall mention the service in hospitals and housing. There are real problems in the hospitals in my borough, because of the historic difficulties of hospital structure. I believe that there are some funding problems as well. Therefore, there are many complaints; but every effort is made by the hospital authorities to deal with those complaints.

There are very thorough, efficient investigations every time that there is a complaint. Fast responses are given and efforts are made to improve whatever went wrong. I pay great tribute to the chief executive of Bromley hospital, Mark Rees, for the efficiency with which he deals with the complaints. He personally looks into all the problems and replies himself.

In comparison, Bromley housing is appalling when it comes to complaints. It is slow; the chief executive never replies. He directs it to the deputy chief executive, who never replies. The complaint is directed down the line to somebody much lower in the structure, who writes back a standard letter. There is no response, and the public say the same. One constituent telephoned me the other day. He said that he had made a complaint in reasoned terms, and that the response of the housing association had been "sod off".

My last example relates to the rail service, which leaves much to be desired in many areas of London including the service to Beckenham. However, there has been a clear

improvement in attitudes and in the quality of service. I suspect that that has come about because of the rail charter. For the first time, people know what they are entitled to expect, and, for the first time, the rail operators have a standard against which they must match performance. That is very significant.

The second report on the citizens charter, which was published in 1994, contains a splendid chart on rail services. However, I am worried about the setting of the standards. According to the standards set for Kent coast, 82 per cent. of trains should arrive within five minutes of the scheduled time.

Within five minutes of the scheduled time might not be particularly late if one is travelling a long distance. However, for a 20-minute or 25-minute journey, the kind of journeys made by many commuters, five minutes late may be a quarter of the expected journey time. If only 82 per cent. of trains are expected to meet that target, and if trains are late at commuter times in the morning and afternoon, the service will be much worse than the standard makes it appear to be.

Although I understand that there must be a gradual process, step by step, the sooner the target is 100 per cent. and perfect timekeeping, the better. We would then really be able to assess the performance. Passengers will accept that the 100 per cent. target will never be achieved, but the target should be the highest as we could then measure the real achievement against that target.

My remarks have been longer than I intended. There is much evidence to show that the citizens charter was an excellent idea and a superb concept, and that it is achieving what it set out to achieve. Let us hope that that continues and that, in another four or five years, we can look back and say that the achievements have been miraculous and that they have been made in areas where no such achievements were reached by other means. Let us particularly hope that the public will recognise what is, after all, rightfully theirs—the highest possible standards from every area of local and central Government services.

1.32 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I welcome this debate and it is significant that it is the first debate on the subject for nearly three years. Everyone in the Chamber today has agreed that the citizens charter has changed the face of public service to our citizens. No other country pays so much attention to the rights of the individual.

Anyone who has sat on the wrong side of a desk, facing heavy red tape, buck-passing, officialdom and, frankly, plain off-hand rudeness will know what a blessing it is to be regarded now as a consumer with rights and dignity. In short, a revolution has taken place. The fury and frustration over the delivery of public services have been brought under control.

We now take for granted the improvements in our lives. As has already been said, the achievements have been considerable. Since 1991, 40 specific charters have been introduced, covering everything from social services to education and transport.

Mr. Deva: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as there is only one Labour Member on the Opposition Benches, it is clear that Labour Members have taken for granted the fact that the citizens charter is such a success that they can contribute nothing to this debate?

Lady Olga Maitland: I have always tended to agree with my hon. Friend, but in this regard I could not agree with him more. It is very telling to see a lonely figure on the Opposition Benches.

I echo previous comments about the utter hypocrisy of the Liberal Democrats. I have seen examples of it in my constituency. The Liberal Democrats control Sutton council, and they have the nerve to publish their own charter for council services. It is the same old story: they make declarations and they say that they will consult, but do they ever pay attention to people's representations? The answer is no. The emptiness of the Opposition Benches is significant.

Let us consider the way in which matters have changed so significantly. It is no accident that we now have more flexible opening hours for benefit and employment offices. It is no accident that, nowadays, public servants must identify themselves in person and on the telephone. It is no accident that council tenants are entitled to have most repairs done right away when their lethargic local authority fails to deal with them promptly. That is a particular problem in Labour and Liberal Democratic authorities. It is no accident that we can claim a refund from British Rail if trains are cancelled or are delayed unreasonably.

I have received a refund and had an expensive taxi fare paid for me by British Rail after a disastrous train journey from Falmouth to Norwich. Everything that could go wrong went wrong. There are compensations and achievements in the citizens charter. However, I should not like British Rail to think that all is totally satisfactory. I refer to the problems of one of my constituents. His latest letter is one of total fury. He says:

"I thought you might be interested that one calendar month later"—

having written to British Rail—

"they have yet to even send me a letter of acknowledgement. Naturally I am livid".

The cause of his problem was a train journey that he tried to make some time ago. He arrived at the station and was informed that the train that he wanted to catch had been delayed. He was then told that it was expected at a certain time, but much later he was told that the train was cancelled. As a result, that poor gentleman was vastly late for his appointment. He had to take a very roundabout route. He felt very aggrieved indeed. Matters are worse when British Rail fails to respond. I hope that that gentleman will get the justice that he deserves. The citizens charter is now in place to help travellers such as that gentleman. I hope that he receives the positive response that I received.

I now refer to the rather disappointing response of the Labour party. I listened with great care and attention to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). He seemed to be rather peeved when my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) referred to people who have centrally heated homes, together with Volvos and fax machines. He seemed to think that that was unfair. It should have been pointed out to him—I was tempted to do so at that time—that the prosperity of people who drive Volvos and, therefore, pay much higher taxes as a result of their success, provides the social

[Lady Olga Maitland]

services that the right hon. Gentleman demanded for his constituents, who clearly have great need. Therefore, it is rather unworthy to jeer at other people's success.

I come now to the Labour party's reaction to the citizens charter. We should look back to the days when the charter was launched, when Neil Kinnock—the then leader of the Labour party—described the concept as "banal and ineffective". He then brought out his own version, which offered layers of extra and unnecessary bureaucracy. Where he was short of ideas, he echoed measures which had already been put forward by the Conservative party. It seems to be the same old tale of copycat politics and of the Labour party trusting to luck that the public will be duped into accepting its propaganda, as against the real version offered by the Government.

Although I am tempted to spend time tearing apart the Labour party's position on its failed charter ideas, time is precious and I shall press on. The best way for me to illustrate the citizens charter is to describe the progress of the patients charter on behalf of my constituents. Our local hospital, St. Helier's, holds trust status. It is a flagship with an enviable record, and its waiting lists have come down dramatically.

The first commitment of the patients charter is respect for privacy and dignity. I welcome the fact that, in April, there will be a patients charter commitment to warn patients when their operations are confirmed if there is a likelihood of their having to be placed in a mixed-sex ward. I accept that patients can object and opt to wait for a later date in the hope that they can be put in a small, four-bedded ward. This subject causes acute embarrassment—especially to women—and we must work harder to return to the traditional segregated-sex wards.

I have been rather disturbed to find that, when talking to hospital authorities, there is a feeling that they will retain mixed-sex wards unless the issue rises higher on the agenda. I very much hope that, in the end, the message will get through that there are intense feelings about the matter. I shall never forget the day my mother found herself in a mixed-sex ward, and it was not an experience which she ever wanted to repeat. We should place a high value on personal dignity and modesty. I welcome St. Helier's commitment to experimenting with flexible solid screens which can be put into a ward as room dividers; that may go some way towards relieving the problem.

The patients charter revolutionised the management of the accident and emergency department. Today, 93 per cent. of patients are given a full medical assessment—not just a cursory glance—within five minutes of their arrival at St. Helier's. That can be compared with one year ago, when 62 per cent. of patients were assessed in five minutes. One can see that progress has been remarkable.

There has also been a remarkable change in the out-patients department. I can well remember attending an antenatal clinic as a national health patient at Westminster hospital 23 years ago. I was called in with 30 other mothers for a 2.30 appointment, and it was quite normal to have to sit around for up to two hours half-undressed. Even then, I had no idea who was attending me, let alone the name of the nurse in charge. The very idea of continuity, or of being cared for by the same person, was quite unknown. There was also the obvious risk that symptoms could perhaps be overlooked. I just wish that I had been able to take advantage of the patients charter, as it would have made the arrival of my first child a much more pleasant experience.

My experience may be compared with the fact that, today, 83 per cent. of out-patients at St. Helier's are now seen within 30 minutes of arriving at hospital. Good management has meant insisting that consultants and other clinicians are on time and that they start their surgeries promptly. The pressure goes all around.

I shall mention briefly the report that came out this week on maladministration. In case I could be accused of looking at the citizens charter through rose-tinted spectacles, I shall make this remark. It is entirely appropriate that, if we want the citizens charter to flourish, public service should be subject to close analysis and even criticism. There is no shame in faults being brought to light if there is then a concerted effort to put them right. It would also be great folly to be complacent and believe that all is well in the public sector simply because the charter exists.

The report focuses on the right to full, speedy and courteous compensation when things go wrong. It made the telling remark:

> "We have come across unwillingness to admit fault, refusal to apologise, failure to identify and compensate all those affected by maladministration."

I entirely support the notion that those who suffer injustice as a result of maladministration should be compensated. I welcome the report's view that matters of redress should in future be examined less in the light of protecting the public purse and more in the light of a complainant's rights. Indeed, only as a result of pressure in that regard are ex gratia payments now considered.

Although we should always be ready to hear and act on complaints, we should also be ready to deal sensitively and appropriately with grievances. Complaints may have increased as a result of the public's greater awareness of their rights, but many people, I regret to say, maintain a stoical silence. Research still shows that there is a range of potential barriers in the way of making a complaint. The position is not helped by negative, defensive or discouraging attitudes in the organisation that is held responsible.

Sometimes, having the simple humility to say, "Sorry. I do apologise," can do more than anyone could imagine to repair a damage or injury, although it may not be completely resolved. Government Departments can grow in stature only if they keep in mind the slogan, "The consumer is always right." We should take careful heed of the report and profit from its lessons. Only in that way can we continue successfully to build on the citizens charter, which has undoubtedly changed the face of Britain.

1.46 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): The citizens charter is a major innovation of the Prime Minister. He deserves considerable credit for its introduction. It has afforded the ordinary citizen a unique opportunity to monitor government and demand improvements where standards are not high enough.

My interest in the matter goes back to a career in accountancy, which is also very much involved in the provision and use of information. In the accounting firm

for which I worked, I showed an interest in the performance of government. The firm did work for the Government, and still does to this day. One of the partners handed me a paper on performance measurement and the use of performance indicators. The paper had been presented by one of the senior partners to some civil servants and Government officials in the 1960s. Sadly, their response was not what we would expect today. Understanding was not high of how the Government should relate to performance indicators.

Indeed, in the 1960s and part of the 1970s, the Government and bureaucracy tended to take the view that performance indicators and measurement existed in the private sector but not the public sector. I am delighted that the Government have proved that there is every justification for using performance indicators and measurement.

As a result of the citizens charter, we have also increased accountability. Now that we have measures of performance, we can go to the people who are responsible and point out where performance does not achieve the required level. That was not possible before. As a result, public services are improving everywhere. We need only look at education and the new policy on grant-maintained schools that the Conservative Government have introduced. It is so good that the Leader of the Opposition wants some of it. Indeed, he wants it so badly that he will drive his son eight miles, past nearly 100 Labour-controlled schools, to get some of it.

The way in which the citizens charter operates benefits my constituents to a great extent. In Dover, the district council's housing department obtained a charter mark award. The council is measuring performance indicators more closely than ever before, and there has been a realistic understanding among all public sector organisations in my constituency of what is expected of them.

We have better telephone, gas, electricity and water services. The quality of those services is being monitored all the time. I wrote to each of the privatised utilities that delivers services to my constituents and asked for details of their performances, the quality of services and the way in which they monitor them. I received some impressive and detailed information on how those services are improving.

Mr. Deva: Is my hon. Friend aware that, at a time when we are trying to set the people free and get bureaucracy off their backs, the Opposition have come up with recommendations that, should they ever be in government again, they would create eight new Ministries, 15 new bodies for regional government, 15 more local government organisations and, would you believe it Mr. Deputy Speaker, 112 utilities and regulators for business and the economy?

Mr. Shaw: I am incredibly aware not only of that fact, but of a question that my hon. Friend has forgotten to ask: how would the Opposition staff those organisations and quangos? In 1977 and 1978, 150 official posts were held by members of the Trades Union Congress and a large number of posts on quangos were held by Transport and General Workers Union officials. They were all Labour placemen.

The Opposition talk about placemen on present-day organisations, but forget the many totally unqualified people they put on those bodies, who were looking after the interests not of the consumer, but of those people working in the industries, who refused more efficient working practices to serve consumers better. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) not only mentioned one relevant point, but led me to another.

Before that intervention, I was stating how services are changing because of privatisation. In many of the utility and service sectors, we have regulators, and they are studying the efficiency of the industries in a way that never happened when the Labour party was in office.

I well remember trying to get a telephone at the end of the 1970s, when Labour had been running the telephone service. I could not get one, and I had to write to my Member of Parliament and create reasons why I needed one. Fortunately, I had a good reason, as my employer wanted to contact me at weekends and out of normal office hours. If I had not worked for that employer, I would not have had the benefit of a telephone. It is ludicrous that, under Labour, we had to go to our Members of Parliament to get telephones. Today we can telephone British Telecom and get one within a matter of hours.

I am saddened that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) had to leave, but I am sure that he had good reason. He said that BT was not improving its services and was not price-effective, and he said a little about the competition that is moving in from cable television. He did not say as much as he should have about the fact that, in his constituency and in Manchester generally, cable television has taken off in a big way, and that telephony is one of the services it provides in that area. British Telecom is having to react to the price competition that now exists.

I understand that, in Manchester and other parts of the north of England where cable television is very advanced, the telephone services are provided at prices about 20 per cent. below BT's original prices. So we are now seeing considerable reductions in price as a result of the Government's deregulation and British Telecom's privatisation and the increased competition that it now faces.

One or two Opposition Members took a swipe at British Gas. It is easy to do so, as its public relations policy in recent weeks has been open to criticism. But before people rush in to criticise British Gas, they should remember that, before it gave them an opportunity for criticism in the past few weeks, an opinion poll carried out last year on people's perception of quality of service among major British companies listed British Gas as second only to Marks and Spencer. British Gas has moved on considerably, as have all the privatised utilities, in providing better services.

The Child Support Agency was criticised earlier in the debate. The criticisms were unjustified, because they could be levied at the agency's staff. It is unfair of Labour Members to criticise the agency's staff because they have had unprecedented problems, with a campaign of vilification and vitriol against them. Many absent parents and even some mothers with care have not completed their forms properly.

The Child Support Agency is working hard to improve the position but the problem has not been caused by the staff. It has been a problem of creating a difficult new

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system, which everyone believes will be worth while in making parents more responsible for their children, even in homes that have broken up.

My constituents want British Rail to be privatised as fast as possible. The citizens charter has shown that it has not worked well in the public sector. In Kent Coastal, poor timekeeping is among the worst in the country. I hope that the British Rail Board, which this week announced that it could not provide Networker coaches to my constituency—we have been after them for some time—will now be asked to step aside so that we have a proper franchise and privatised operation that will provide a decent service to my constituents. It is simply not good enough at present.

The Labour party has done a bit of scaremongering this week on through ticketing. An actress on the Opposition Benches with more theatre than substance has issued a press release in my constituency. She is so concerned about accuracy and standards that she has managed to spell three of the railway stations in my constituency wrong, so we cannot have much regard to the Labour party's ability to set high standards in education, spelling or any other area of public service.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will be interested in what I am about to mention. The Government should seriously consider an information provision charter, not only in terms of the response of public bodies, Government Departments and local councils to letter writing and setting standards, but also to ensure that those standards are widely known.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary developed the Internet in terms of putting the Government on it and giving citizens access to it. It now provides a service that was not available before last November. The World Wide Web server, which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary introduced, has a lot of information available to it. Its electronic address is HTTP://WWW.OPEN.GOV. I give that information in the hope that people will take advantage of having access to it.

That World Wide Web server has had 300,000 accesses since November. Many people are already obtaining Government information from it. The server could be a fundamental basis on which a new information provision charter could operate. We should have more information about the quality and provision of services provided over the server. We should have more information about choices that can be taken by citizens involving different service providers in the public sector.

There are many opportunities for health statistics, for example, to be put on the Internet. That would give citizens the choice of different providers of services that they may require. There should be comparative information on councils' performances. It should be put on the Internet World Wide Web server. League tables should be posted. They would be much more useful than the propaganda sheets that some councils put out, which relate to individual councils. Their performances are not compared with other councils.

The Government are doing a tremendously good job in introducing the citizens charter in a way that many people did not envisage, and enabling ordinary citizens to have real power over national government and local government. We need now to find new ways of giving people information that they can use so as to empower them more than at present to monitor government and demand more of government. It is every citizen's right continuously to demand more of government. It is our job to try to provide more, but not necessarily by increasing the cost of government.

2.1 pm

Mr. Henderson: With the leave of the House, I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few more remarks. I spoke fairly lengthily earlier and I do not propose to repeat my first speech.

This has been an interesting debate. It has drawn out two basic philosophical approaches to public services. In a sense, philosophies have crossed the House. One group of Members believes that public services are all about satisfying consumers and that the consumer knows best. We do not need to go much further than that to say that we get the public services for which we can pay. That is the way in which consumers are dealt with in the private sector. I think that that is an erroneous philosophical position.

I am much more encouraged by the view taken by some Conservative Members, including the hon. Members for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) and for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). They said that they liked to be considered as citizens in their use of public services. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), they objected to the term "customer" in respect of British Rail and preferred to be recognised as a passenger. If, with a bit of luck, I catch the 3 pm to Newcastle, I hope that I shall travel as a passenger and not merely as a customer.

All our constituents use public services. They have a right to use them as citizens. As citizens, they have the privilege to exercise that right. That involves more than pure consumerism.

Several interesting common-sense points have been made. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) felt strongly about the need for public services to be sensitive to the consumer. He does not want things to go as far as they have in the United States, where "Have a good day" had to be said on all occasions. That reminds me of the time when I was in America telling Americans about the contrast between service in their country, whether in the private or public sectors, and in some parts of Britain. In America, someone in the hamburger stall to which the hon. Member for Beckenham referred, might say, "What would you like, sir?" A translation of that in Britain is, "Yes?" I think that we have all experienced that.

Good private sector companies in Britain do not treat their customers in an abrupt way. As I have said, the public service should adopt the best practices that are followed in the private sector. The "What would you like, sir?" approach is one that I would like to see adopted.

The hon. Member for Beckenham wanted to dish out his own charter marks. We had Paddy marks earlier in the week, and we may have Piers marks today.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East said that accountability in the control of public services is important and that he is worried about some of the directions of Government policy and over-centralisation. Those are important issues that have been recognised by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) addressed us on his favourite subject—the matron. I wondered whether, like me, he looked back to the great

days of the "Carry On" films and was reminded of that concept, or perhaps he has a craving for the return of Baroness Thatcher; I am not sure which. He made some interesting points about the administration of public services. The whole question of identity of management at a local level is important, so I agree with his view on that.

A number of hon. Members raised the issue of standards and in many ways much of the debate on that concentrated on British Rail. The basic point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was that simply having a charter would not result in an improvement in rail services. Other things must be done to achieve that. That is true for all public services—charters are welcome as a test of what is happening, but services will not automatically improve unless other things are done. That is very clear in the case of British Rail.

I was surprised that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) complained about the rail service to the Kent coast and argued that privatisation would lead to a great improvement. I would have thought that the one thing that would lead to an improvement in that service would be investment in a decent rail line from London to the channel tunnel, with links to that line. Surely the issue is whether that can be provided with either private or public funds. That is what will determine whether there will be a better rail service. It does not matter whether the operator is private or public; no private operator could ever afford the infrastructure investment for such a project. There is not a country in the world where that happens. Of course, if there was a decent rail link to Dover the hon. Member for Beckenham could have a station on the line.

Unless we invest in good public services, no amount of charters, charter marks or any other hype will provide a better service for the public. It is no hype that through-ticketing services will no longer be available from many stations. Hon. Members can get on the train at one station and, when they get to the end of that track, find another ticket office to buy the next ticket, or they might use their credit cards to pay the guard on the train. However, ordinary citizens, especially the elderly, just want one hassle at one ticket office. They want their tickets to carry them the whole way through their journeys.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) referred to her journey from Falmouth to Norwich. If she had aged relatives with her, they would not want to have to buy new tickets at each main station. It is important that the through-ticketing service is protected and charters alone cannot do that.

The hon. Lady referred to the need for housing repairs to be carried out promptly. I would not for one moment suggest that there should not be a charter that encourages or even demands that local councils do their best to ensure that when people have a problem with their windows, doors, pipes or whatever, they receive immediate service where that is possible. I am all in favour of that, but it would be wrong to jump from that to saying that that is how we can improve housing. My city of Newcastle needs to spend £200 million on housing to bring it up to the standards set by the Department of the Environment. No housing charter will achieve that—there must be investment in housing.

I am not making an ideological point about whether the money for that investment should come from public or private funds, but unless it comes from some funds no amount of charters will improve the lot of those in Newcastle who need improved housing. I am sure that that is true throughout the country.

The citizens charter is about more than statistics. If it is to have an important role in changing things and if it is to lead to better investment in, more commitment to and better delivery of public services, I am all in favour of having as many and as tough charters as possible. Charters alone, however, will not lead to an improvement in those public services, which all of our constituents want. The test, of course, is whether that improvement takes place.

As I said in my speech earlier, a new approach is needed in the delivery of public services. We must get away from the idea of using a tough stick to batter already low-paid workers into accepting worse conditions. The best private sector companies disregarded that approach long ago. They have recognised that they cannot compete internationally with that approach. To be efficient, private sector companies must adopt the best techniques and best operational systems. People must be properly trained and secure in their job because their employer values them and wants them to stay with the company. If we are to have good public services, the same ethos must exist in the public sector. That will be a central point in Labour's policy at the next general election.

2.10 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who expressed their condolences to him on his sad loss this week. I know that he will be grateful for their words.

This has been an extremely good debate. Seven of my hon. Friends have taken part, as well as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) made a number of interventions. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) has been doing sterling work. He has not been able to take part in the debate, although I know that he would have wanted to. He has, however, been present throughout the debate. Hon. Members have mentioned that no Liberal Members have been present. I shall return to that matter in a minute.

I shall try to answer as many as possible of the points that have been made. In his closing remarks, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, speaking on behalf of the Labour party, made a point that was echoed by the right hon. Member for Gorton. They talked about their distaste for people being called customers. They said that it was erroneous for public servants to think of people using the public service as customers. That reveals a great deal about their real position.

It is a matter of who exercises power. Under the last Labour Government, or before we had the citizens charter, there was no question that power was exercised by the people who provided the services. They decided the quality of service and opening hours, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) referred. Increasingly, however, people who use

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

the service decide such matters. They know what the service should be and how it should be delivered. They have information published regularly about it which was never published before. When something goes wrong, they know how to complain.

Mr. Henderson: The Minister has misunderstood the point that was made by not only me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) but one or two Conservative Members. It is a question not only of customers but of people being more than customers. Customers are people who might accept that there should be no through ticketing services on the London-Brighton railway line, provided that 10p is taken off their fare. Citizens are people who want to travel, like the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and perhaps some of her aged relatives, from Falmouth to Norwich because they have important things to do in relation to their family. They want a guarantee that they can buy a through ticket and that their rights are greater than those of the strict, pure consumer.

Mr. Hughes: I understand the point. I do not want to get into an argument about semantics, but I do not understand how one can be more than a customer. When I use my local hospital or when my children go to the local school, I do not have much choice about that. Those are the services that are provided and I want to be a customer. As a customer of Marks and Spencer, Tesco or Sainsbury's, I have a choice and I can take my custom elsewhere. The point is that people using public services do not have that choice, so to give them the rights of customers is to give them more rights than they had before. If we can agree on that point, I shall be delighted that the hon. Gentleman is coming around to our way of thinking.

A revolution is taking place and the citizens charter is a big part of it. When one goes to an out-patient department, one now receives a timed appointment, which was thought to be a ridiculous pipe-dream only a few years ago. Citizens can now find out how their child's school compares with others; before, it was a matter of hearsay and what other people thought of a school. Now, those of us who have to choose to which school to send our children have clear information about how schools are performing.

There is no doubt from my use of public services and in the experience of my constituents relayed to me that queues are shortening, letters are answered more quickly, telephones are picked up faster, faceless bureaucrats now have names, and even smiles and, if that does not happen, it is much easier to complain. That was not the case only a few years ago.

Telephoning a benefit, tax or council office about a minor matter, but one which was important to the individual, used to mean being passed from pillar to post. One did not know to whom one was speaking because no name was given. As for complaining, one did not bother because one assumed that one would not get anywhere. Much, if not all, of that has changed.

As has been recognised by many hon. Members, especially my colleagues, we are involved in a 10-year programme for the management of change. A great deal has changed but much has not yet changed. Improvements are made every year and standards are rising. When the new patients charter is published, I am sure that all the leaks in the newspapers, including that in the *Daily Mail* today, will prove to be true. Standards will be improved still further, waiting times will be reduced and there will be more guarantees. That is the direction in which we are heading.

At the heart of the charters are some fundamental rights for us all. They include the right to expect certain standards of service, certain information to be provided and the right to be dealt with openly.

I deal now with the matters raised today. I shall respond to as many as possible. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North mentioned the cones hotline. It is true that it has not had a terribly good press. It is always easy to be wise after the event, but I think that, had I been the Minister involved, I would have pleaded for at least a different name for it. However, it has done a more valuable job than has been acknowledged.

There have been more than 10,000 calls to the cones hotline since June 1992 and callers do not merely wish to complain about the cones. I do not think that the name was satisfactory, because the line is part of a traffic information service. It provides a great deal of information to road users about what is happening on the roads. Its very existence has made the work of the Highways Agency easier in that the people doing essential repairs on motorways are aware that their progress is monitored. They know that they have to do the work in the shortest possible time and remove the cones quickly. I do not necessarily defend everything about the cones hotline, but it is important to recognise that it has been more valuable than generally presumed.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North mentioned a Trades Union Congress poll on the citizens charter. Personally, what he said did not surprise me. As I understand it, people were asked whether they had read the citizens charter, whereas they should have been asked whether they had read the citizens charters, because there is a patients charter, a passengers charter, a parents charter and others.

If one asks people, "What does this mean to you?" they will probably say, "Not very much." If one asks, "Does a timed appointment in hospital mean much to you? Does the information about the way in which your hospital is performing in the league tables mean much to you? Do the league tables for schools mean much to you? Does the fact that you are guaranteed to get an annual report on the progress of your child mean much to you?" the answers will, of course, be yes. The TUC poll was a very small poll. A larger, more recent poll, the British attitude survey, has shown increased public satisfaction with services, including health and education. That simply cannot be separated from the effect of the citizens charters.

I now turn to openness and the code of practice on open government. The code only came into effect on 4 April last year. Some 52,000 copies of a leaflet explaining the operation of the code of practice have been distributed to more than 1,300 outlets, such as citizens advice bureaux, libraries and other places. Information about the code of practice is available from the citizens charter publication line. My Department has sent out 5,600 copies of the code of practice, in addition to the copies sent out by the publication line. I do not think that it is appropriate to spend large sums on this. The code of practice is working. The question is, if people want to get government

information, are they able to get it and is there a mechanism to ensure that the information is made available even if the Department concerned does not want to make it available? That mechanism is available.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster intervened during the speech by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North to point out that the total expenditure of non-departmental public bodies, or quangos, is £15.5 billion and that the £46 billion so often quoted by the Labour party comes from a report, suitably named "Ego Trip", which assumes that Government policy on schools will be so successful that there will be 5,000 grant-maintained schools in place by 1996. Labour's figures are confused and people should go rather more by our figures. Housing associations, training and enterprise councils and NHS trusts can hardly be called quangos.

Mr. Henderson: What does the Minister call them?

Mr. Hughes: I call them local people making local decisions on the running of local services. It is insulting to people who give their time to serve on housing associations, whether local people or people from churches, charities or businesses—all people who give their time to work in housing associations for no recompense—to suggest that they are members of quangos appointed by the Government and responsible to Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) made a thoughtful and interesting speech in which he put the citizens charter and the reforms into a historical and social context. I noted his support for next steps agencies and his warning that we need to adapt and to change budgeting arrangements. I also noted his concern about the possibility of centralisation. The Government are, of course, taking steps to modernise structures and accrual accounting has already been introduced in key areas, such as the national health service and executive arrangements. The structures are being developed to be used more widely in Government.

The right hon. Member for Gorton also objects to the use of the word "customers"; I have already covered that point. He made some remarks about British Telecom which were odd coming from a former Industry Minister. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) pointed out, only a few years ago one simply could not get a telephone. I served on the postal and telecommunications advisory committee in London in the early 1980s. The main problem was how one got a telephone; people had to set up businesses without telephones. The idea that British Telecom has deteriorated is a fantasy. I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point about the two telephone boxes he mentioned; he should understand that 96 per cent. of public telephones are in working order compared with 75 per cent. in 1987. The number of pay phones operated by BT has increased by 50 per cent. from 80,000 to 122,000. Also, the allegation that, somehow, people making trans-Atlantic calls were being subsidised by the right hon. Gentleman's constituents is nonsense when one considers that the price of telephone calls has fallen by more than 30 per cent. since privatisation.

The right hon. Member for Gorton, with a few other hon. Members, raised the scare that through ticketing was to disappear. He took one of a range of suggestions made by the regulator as being the one that will come into effect and therefore sought to get the maximum amount of scaremongering from it. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam answered that well, making the point that it is just scaremongering. It was also answered very well by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover.

The right hon. Member for Gorton raised several constituency cases. He asked me whether I would give him advice on why I had been more successful with Railtrack than him. I shall answer in a slightly wider context. I get the impression, as I think do my hon. Friends, that when the right hon. Gentleman has a constituency problem, he starts at the top, which means that he genuinely believes what was said by Labour Ministers in the 1940s—if a bedpan is dropped in a hospital, the Minister is responsible for it. That is not the point. The point is that the people running the services, who are as close as possible to the delivery of the service, are the people responsible. Whereas, of course, I understand and sympathise with the point that he makes about the Gorton medical centre, my starting point would not have been with the Secretary of State. It would have been with the family health services authority. It is given the money and the responsibility to make those changes. It is responsible and, if it were not carrying out those changes, I would have worked up from there.

Mr. Kaufman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, after my 25 years in the House of Commons, for giving me advice on how to look after my constituents. My constituents certainly seem satisfied, since they have increased my majority from 3,000 to 16,000 in that period. I did not start at the top on the Railtrack issue. I started with what I believed to be the local office which would deal with the matter. I communicated with that local office on several occasions. I went to the top because the people lower down were not responding and I was determined to get a response somehow.

Mr. Hughes: I said earlier that I hesitated to give advice to the right hon. Gentleman, especially as I knew that he was a very experienced Member of the House. Indeed, I have taken much comfort from reading much of his book "How to be a Minister", which is excellent. If I may, I shall quote one part, which I hoped that the right hon. Gentleman would not quote to me. Talking about private offices, he wrote:

> "Preparing a speech for a Minister is all part of the presumption by the Department that, unless proved otherwise, their Minister is an imbecile".

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not take that view of the speech that I am delivering today. However, he raises a serious point about Railtrack and I hope very much that Railtrack has taken it on board. It is supposed to respond; if the right hon. Gentleman is not getting any more success, I should be very happy, as one of the Ministers responsible for public service, to add what I can to what has already been done by other Ministers to help him.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North talked about quangos and next steps agencies, all of which he apparently opposes. The hon. Gentleman is becoming increasingly isolated in his view about next steps

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agencies. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report published towards the end of last year said:

"We believe that Next Steps Agencies represent a significant improvement in the organisation of Government, and that any future Government will want to maintain them in order to implement its objectives for the delivery of services to the public."

It is clearly my view that next steps agencies represent an increase in quality of the delivery of service. It would be unthinkable that a Government would want to go back to a point where next steps agencies disappeared and people were not responsible, in running those agencies or, indeed, in local offices, for the services that they delivered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam said that we want people to be responsible for what they are doing whether those people are at the top or at the bottom. The people at the top have a responsibility for policy and for setting guidelines. However, if someone fails to receive a girocheque or if someone receives bad service at a benefits office, the manager of that office must examine the service that is delivered. I believe that that is happening increasingly.

The reform programme spearheaded by the citizens charter is transforming our public services. The emphasis has already started to shift from a series of self-absorbed bureaucracies to individual services genuinely concerned to respond to the needs of their users and in respect of which the users increasingly have a voice. That is welcomed by our constituents and it should be welcomed by the House.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, pursuant to the Sessional Order of 19th December (Sittings of the House (Private Members' Business)), the House shall not sit on the following Fridays:

Friday 10th March, Friday 12th May, Friday 19th May, Friday 26th May, Friday 16th June, Friday 23rd June, Friday 7th July and Friday 21st July;

and that, at its rising on each preceding Thursday, the House shall adjourn till the following Monday, unless it shall have resolved otherwise.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 19th January, the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. William Waldegrave relating to the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) (No. 2) Scheme 1994 and Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Farm and Conservation Grant (Amendment) Regulations 1994 not later than one and a half hours after the first such Motion has been made.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Sir Michael Marshall be discharged from the Select Committee on Procedure and Sir John Cope be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That Dr. Norman A. Godman be discharged from the Select Committee on European Legislation and Rachel Squire be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

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Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Let me say at the outset that I have a considerable amount of ground to cover, and I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to be able to respond to all the points that I raise this afternoon. However, may I tell him in a very warm sense that I would be delighted to hear from him quickly if he can assist me positively on all my points, but if he is going to disappoint me in respect of some of them, it might be better if I did not hear from his Department. Perhaps I will not be disappointed on any of the issues that I raise.

I welcome the opportunity of this debate, because it allows me to pay a wholesome tribute to Sir Neil Shields, the chairman of the Commission for the New Towns. I was very sad to hear that he is to retire, although I obviously wish his successor all the luck in the world in his new job.

Sir Neil Shields has been a very good friend to me, and above all else, to Basildon. He has given the Commission for the New Towns superb leadership, and he has been ably assisted by his deputy, Lord Finsberg. Basildon would be a poorer place had it not been for the contribution of Sir Neil Shields and others.

I do not forget the predecessor of Sir Neil Shields, the late Dame Elizabeth Coker, who was chairman of the development corporation. She was a magnificent leader for the local community and she achieved so much on behalf of my constituents. She was served splendidly by two officers—Mr. Douglas Galloway and Mr. Harry Bacon. I and others owe them a great debt of gratitude.

For so many Members of Parliament, housing tends to be among the biggest issues, so I wish to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to that problem first. Thanks to the good offices of the Commission for the New Towns, the excellent Conservative-controlled Basildon district council and the Basildon housing association, the transfer of the housing stock has been achieved at long last.

During my time in this place, I have dealt with 11 Ministers responsible for new towns. It does not seem to be a responsibility that is always eagerly accepted; whether that is because I tend to raise matters, I do not know.

The socialists so often sabotage housing transfers. I recall that, when I took a deputation to meet Lord Skelmersdale, it transpired that one of the people in the deputation was a socialist activist. When I asked the Minister to play a video which was supposed to promote the transfer, the person who had accompanied me in the deputation to assist in the transfer, appeared on the video quite clearly working against us. Because of the socialists' reluctance to reach an agreement with the Department of the Environment and the Commission for the New Towns, the town of Basildon was damaged financially.

My criticism, if there is a criticism of the transfer, is that, unfortunately, a number of loose ends were not tidied up before the properties were transferred. It would have been preferable if all outstanding matters were settled, rather than the superb Conservative-controlled Basildon district council being left to try to sort out all the loose ends.

I have become increasingly annoyed at the number of complaints from my constituents about the standard of work of contractors employed by the CNT. It makes me so wild, when I consider how difficult it is for businesses to obtain building work, that, when they win contracts, they are often poorly supervised. Let there be no doubt about it. Public money is being spent on that work. Frankly, the mickey is being taken out of the system. If contractors who are engaged do not come up to standard, they should not be given another opportunity. The CNT knows only too well the contractors I am talking about. I hope that they will quickly put their house in order.

I now refer to the Five Links project, which is very important for my constituents. It is a major housing redevelopment scheme that the board of the CNT has approved in principle. Last summer, we toured the estate with the then Housing Minister, my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young). That scheme is essential. I want it to go ahead, and I will not rest until it goes ahead, but, for that to happen, a contribution is needed from the Commission for the New Towns.

First, it needs to release the council from the clawback provisions relating to the Five Links estate. Secondly, it needs to waive any covenant on the use of land at Markham's Chase. Thirdly, it needs to enable a transfer at nil cost, either freehold or under licence, the land comprising the alleyways and vehicle access routes to the adjacent individual dwellings within Five Links.

Fourthly, it needs to transfer at nil cost two of the small parcels of land at the fringes of the Five Links estate. Fifthly—perhaps this is the most controversial point; the Treasury is concerned about it—it needs to provide additional land to the approximate value of £5 million. On that point, the lost benefit to the Exchequer is much less than it may seem at first. Much of the land has no real planning value.

If my hon. Friend the Minister cannot respond this afternoon, I hope that he will write to me, but I want to know whether he supports the Five Links scheme, whether the Department of the Environment supports it, and whether the Commission for the New Towns supports the regeneration of the Five Links estate. If the answer is yes, will the Commission for the New Towns provide sufficient resources to make the scheme work well? Again, if the answer is yes, may I, as the local Member of Parliament for Basildon, go back to my constituents and announce that the scheme will actually go ahead?

Work on the Siporex estate is about to begin. Basildon housing association is doing all that it possibly can to ensure that the project runs smoothly. To that end, any assistance that the Commission for the New Towns could give would be greatly appreciated. I would also appreciate it if, at some stage, I could have either from the Department or from the CNT a comprehensive breakdown of the outstanding plots of land which are to be disposed of.

I believe that, with 12 years experience in Basildon, I have some sensible suggestions to make. If I had been listened to on a number of points, perhaps some of the ridiculous development proposals would have been avoided.

One which absolutely incenses me is the proposed development of a beautiful part of Basildon, in which nestles the 13th-century St. Nicholas church. This beautiful silver birch forest is being proposed by the

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CNT—which wants to get in as much money as it can to give back to the Exchequer—as a site for a business park. That is not acceptable to me, to local councillor Terry Fleet or to my constituents.

There are many other areas of scrubland in Basildon which could be used, and there are also vacant dwellings which would be warmly welcomed new businesses. It would be an absolute disgrace if that beautiful parcel of land was developed into a business park. Councillor Fleet is leading the campaign to stop the development, and I shall back him to the hilt.

Everyone in Basildon realises that, before the CNT is wound up in 1998, it has a duty to obtain the best price it can for the taxpayer via the sale of its remaining landholdings in the district. That does not mean that the process should not be conducted without a healthy dose of common sense. In recent months, the CNT has unfortunately become somewhat over-zealous in its desire to dispose of land.

For instance, the CNT organised a major exhibition of land for sale in Basildon last November, at which a number of sites suitable for residential land were advertised, despite the fact that some were in existing or proposed green belt areas.

One of the major housing estates transferred to Basildon council by the CNT was the Langdon Hills estate, adjacent to Laindon high road. The CNT recently finished three years of disruptive remedial works against water damage to foundations which needed to be underpinned. The CNT's contractors are now going through a snagging period to ensure that all work has been completed to a high standard. However, I have toured the estate several times, and many residents have been rightly dissatisfied by the way in which the work was carried out. For example, a large part of a retaining wall on the estate collapsed while being repaired.

The CNT has bequeathed the estate and its residents the last collective heating system in Basildon, which was installed by Ove Arup and is now 20 years old. It is expensive to maintain, and very unreliable. The estimated cost of installing individual gas central heating would be between £1 million and £2 million, and the council has taken steps to initiate a technical report specifically on the issue in response to residents' requests. Given all the problems which residents have suffered, it would be equitable if CNT was prepared to finance all or part of the new heating system, and that is what I am asking for.

The CNT has been carrying out major structural repairs to houses on the Vange II estate in Basildon since November 1993. The estate comprises 133 houses and bungalows arranged in 19 terraces. The work on the contract, which involves families having to leave their homes while they are being dealt with, has been painstakingly slow. By November last year, only two of the terrace blocks had been completed. That is ridiculous.

The CNT has now suspended its original contractor, and the work is not now due to start until November this year. That really is not good enough. The work has been disruptive and noisy, and residents are rightly disillusioned about the standard of work which has not been satisfactory. The four-month hiatus until April only compounds that. For the people living on the Vange II estate, it is becoming intolerable.

Several people have suggested that the £3 million or so which is being spent on the works would be better devoted to completely rebuild of the properties. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), the former Secretary of State for Education, had the responsibilities of my hon. Friend the Minister who will reply to the debate today, he toured the estate and experienced at first hand the difficulties of the structure of the properties.

If it is the intention of the CNT to rebuild, some additional funding will be required, but at least a clear way forward might have been established. It is certain that the CNT's performance on that scheme is below par.

Alongside the CNT housing transfer in 1994, several other community assets such as community centres and playing fields were transferred to the council. They were accompanied by a number of balancing assets such as CNT-owned shops to pay for the upkeep of the transferred sites. A smaller but nonetheless significant number of sites were excluded from the original transfer. Their future is now being dealt with via a community-related assets mark III package.

The council is anxious to take those assets, such as the public open space at Dunton Wills and Steeple View, under its wing for recreational purposes, but it cannot do so until the Commission for the New Towns has provided some method of financing their future maintenance, as it did in the CRA mark I package. The council is eager to see those negotiations completed satisfactorily.

Throughout my time as Member of Parliament for Basildon, I have done my best to promote all the positive attributes of the town. I know that the Commission for the New Towns has done its very best to attract new business and investment into the town. I urge it to have in its mind the level of rents, some of which clearly do not reflect the effects of the downturn in the economy and are extremely unrealistic.

I can relate many instances in which compassion should have been shown to traders of long standing who acted responsibly, did much to attract employment opportunities when they were needed, and were not given help when they suffered in the economic downturn. I refer in particular to many of the smaller parades of shops.

There is also the issue of the sale of Pitsea market. I accept the commission's response to the traders' complaints about the time gap before they received the necessary information, and the commission's recent response to me that it had been even-handed. However, my gut feeling is that it is a tragedy that a situation was not created in which the local traders, who—I do not wish to be patronising—are in every sense the salt of the earth, could purchase Pitsea market.

I am particularly keen to attract Japanese investment into Basildon. As the media never tire of showing us when they depict Basildon on the television, the Fodderwick site in the heart of the town just looks awful. It needs to be knocked down and sold for development. It really is a dreadful eyesore.

I am not asking much from the CNT. We have emptied the building. Two voluntary organisations are stuck in dreadful Nissen huts. I have praised the chairman of the CNT. IF he wants to go out in even greater a blaze of glory, he should do just a little more for Basildon and provide alternative accommodation for those two voluntary organisations.

When I first became the Member of Parliament for Basildon, I embarked on a campaign to promote the town. We started the "I love Basildon" campaign. I especially wanted to promote its shopping facilities. Because of changed retailing patterns, there is universal agreement that changes need to be made to the town centre.

British Land, the new owner, under the excellent chairmanship of Mr. Ritblatt, is doing a magnificent job of running the Eastgate centre. I am delighted that it is going ahead with the refurbishment programme. Its job would be made much easier if changes were made to the town centre management committee, which was set up by the CNT—its income is derived from the car parks, market and bus station.

I congratulate Mr. Ritblatt and Mr. Everard Goodman, the chairman of Tops, on their efforts to make the town centre management company work, but they need and deserve a significant amount of capital from the CNT before they wind up their interest in Basildon. British Land believes that the town centre could be improved by better signage.

Finally, Tops put in a plan for roofing part of the town centre. The local authority sensibly consulted local people, and I am sorry to say that the design did not find favour and the plans were rejected. Our excellent Conservative-controlled Basildon district council and the team at Tops are united in their common interest to see the town centre flourish. I hope that both sides can be brought together.

Basildon is rightly the beacon of the south—indeed, the beacon of the country; if I could get a tiny bit more support from the CNT, the whole world would realise that.

2.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): As my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) pointed out, I may not have time to do more than touch on one or two of the two or three dozen matters that he raised. I must respond on paper about the others—I have already done so on one.

I congratulate my hon. Friend. It would be fair to say, and it would be accepted on both sides of the House, that Basildon gets an especially good innings here, almost weekly. I think that it is down to the excellent Basildon-Amess partnership, which continues to bat regularly and is doing so again.

I was going to use some of the time available to sing the praises of the Commission for the New Towns and the development corporation. To some degree, that has already been done and, given the amount of time left, I ought to leave it to the ensuing correspondence, and try to touch on some of the issues that my hon. Friend raised.

Since my hon. Friend mentioned the easing out of the CNT, it is worth stating one or two facts, however. He mentioned the shopping centre and the changes. Between 1986 and 1991, the CNT spent about £11.5 million on Basildon's roads. It is working in partnership with Essex county council to provide a new urban traffic control system for the town. That was not mentioned, but it is a key factor and one that is worth reiterating.

I must try to deal with some of the two dozen or so issues that my hon. Friend raised. First, he mentioned housing, repairs, maintenance and so forth. Both he and others have made the CNT well aware of the problems. It is aware and it is reacting to it, and I anticipate that action is being taken, even as we speak, to minimise the additional problems that the tenants have suffered.

My hon. Friend also mentioned Vange II. I have noted that and we will look into it. Structural repairs costing about £11 million have been, and are being, undertaken in that area.

Siporex housing has been a success, and I think that my hon. Friend accepts that. I am pleased that there appears to be a happy ending to that problem. As he is well aware, that system-built housing on the Bluehouse estate was transferred to the Basildon community housing association with a complex agreement that involved the CNT in financing £33 million, or 70 per cent., of the redevelopment costs. The scheme will provide about 707 replacement houses during the next six or seven years, which is a sign of the effort that the CNT has put in in that area, and in Basildon generally.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Five Links housing estate. He said that he wants only positive answers and that, if I had negative ones, I should keep them to myself. Here is one that is in between: we must look at the whole system. We are aware of the adventurous approach that is being taken in the scheme.

My hon. Friend listed five points; obviously, he does not expect an answer to all five here and now. It is important, however, that he reflects on the fact that the scheme involves £6 million worth of public land to go to a chosen private firm to build houses for sale at market prices. Part of the profit will go towards the refurbishment of Five Links, but I remind my hon. Friend that the transfer of the Five Links estate to the council reflected the state of the estate. It was accepted that the properties were dilapidated and needed work done on them, which was reflected in their transfer price.

My hon. Friend mentioned land for affordable housing. If he reflects, he will remember that the CNT had already given considerable land for that purpose.

On the proposed business park next door to St. Nicholas church, although my hon. Friend would like a magic wand and would like me to turn back the clock, there is some difficulty. I realise why he is concerned, and can only reiterate that, as he is aware, there is no provision for revoking the planning consent for the development of that site. I am pleased to report, however, that I understand that the CNT is taking considerable steps to ensure that any development is suitably screened and ample landscaping ensures that topography, vegetation and views of the nearby church continue to dominate the appearance of that area.

My hon. Friend said that the centre of town needed support from the CNT. Its importance is accepted as Basildon's retail centre, as has been shown by the CNT's activities. The CNT has continued to support the environment of the town centre in a number of ways.

One small but obvious example is that, during the past year, it has financed the restoration of the original town centrepiece—the "Mother and Child" fountain. It has made significant contributions towards improvements in

[Sir Paul Beresford]

the lighting and seating within Sothernhay, and has also made considerable contributions towards replacing seating and other street furniture in the town square. It has provided land in support of the council's proposals to create a new town square and has contributed towards installing an integrated urban traffic control and signing system. All that will help to improve the town's retail centre.

My hon. Friend briefly mentioned Pitsea market. I understand that the site's new owners are fully committed to ensuring that the market survives and thrives. They have already begun discussing with the traders how they might work together towards that end.

Despite the fact that the CNT is moving towards its wind-down, it is committed to Basildon and is promoting its efforts there. Compared to other areas, a disproportionate amount of the capital expenditure goes into Basildon. I am sure that my hon. Friend will make absolutely certain that there will be no lack of interest in Basildon.

My hon. Friend is right to be proud of Basildon's success. He is also right to aim to secure its success in the future. The CNT is proving that it wishes to bring investment to the town to provide additional employment opportunities and increase the town's prosperity. As I said, Basildon benefited from receiving a considerably higher proportion of the CNT's capital expenditure in 1993-94 than any other southern regional town.

Furthermore, the CNT continues to promote Basildon through public exhibitions and special marketing days. For instance, it has included in that promotion the Basildon '94 exhibition, which promoted Basildon as a place to live and work, and attracted many visitors.

Basildon is now a much better place in which to live and work than it was in 1949. We are all well aware that my hon. Friend will do his utmost to ensure that that continues, and that the Government, the CNT, the council, the private sector, and anyone he can get hold of, will continue to help Basildon in the future. Long may the Basildon-Amess partnership keep batting.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 16 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

European Communities (Finance) Act 1995.

British Waterways Act 1995.

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Economy

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for the Welsh economy during 1995.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): Prospects for the Welsh economy this year are excellent. Unemployment is falling fast; output is expanding; order books are at their best levels since 1988 and business confidence is high. I look forward to a prosperous new year for the Welsh economy.

Mr. Williams: For months now, the Secretary of State and Cabinet Ministers have been talking up the growth and recovery in Britain's economy, but does the Secretary of State accept that the main reason for the recovery has nothing to do with the Government's policies but with black Wednesday and the devaluation caused by it; that the benefits of growth so far have been entirely swallowed up by the public sector borrowing requirement; that there is no feel-good factor among the people at large because during 1994 there was no rise in living standards and that that has been so for the past four or five years?

Mr. Redwood: I do not agree. Of course we are talking the economy up, because it is worth talking up and it will prosper this year and into the future. The Government's policies to control inflation, to have honest money and to develop supply-side reforms are crucial to the success of the economy, just as my policies to promote Wales vigorously at home and abroad and to attract private capital are most important. As confidence returns among ordinary consumers as well the business community, so the feel-good factor will build up, in a way which the hon. Gentleman will find disappointing.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the excellent economic prospects to which he referred will certainly not be enhanced, and may well be threatened, by the rag-bag of devolutionary plans supported by Opposition Members?

Mr. Redwood: I agree that, were those plans ever to come to fruition, they would be a tax on business and would put business off coming to Wales. It would rather go where taxation is lighter and where there are fewer new laws and regulations. But I am intrigued to see that the Islwyn Labour party is against the proposals, just as I am. I am delighted to see that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) is against them. Perhaps he can teach the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), who wants a different kind of authority from that wanted by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). Perhaps the hon. Member for Caerphilly will realise that he is impaled on a difficult fence and that he would be better getting off it on my side on this issue.

Mr. Dafis: In relation to training and enterprise funding, which is an important consideration in the Welsh economy, is the Secretary of State aware that the changes proposed for the coming year are likely to drive out of business some of the high-quality training providers? That is a result of the increased emphasis on output-related funding. Does he accept that scrupulous training providers who emphasise quality and long-term training programmes will be discriminated against in favour of those who sometimes cut corners and emphasise short-term programmes? Will not that be very disadvantageous to disadvantaged groups and to women, the disabled and so on?

Mr. Redwood: That is not the intention of the policy. The intention is to get value for the money that we spend, as measured by the quality of the outputs. We want training that leads to qualifications and real jobs. Those are the criteria that we shall use.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Secretary of State is anxious to talk about Labour party policies, but I wonder why he does not talk about his own, which are a positive disincentive to growth in the Welsh economy? What about his record tax increases, for example, or his cuts in regional aid? There are now record tolls across the Severn bridge into Wales—a Welsh Tory tax. In Wales, we have water bills that are twice the national average—a Welsh Tory tax. In Wales, every taxpayer now pays an extra £1 a week for the Secretary of State's local government changes—a Welsh Tory tax.

On top of that, why does he defend the waste, inefficiency, bureaucracy and political corruption of his quango system? Does he not think that there is any room for improvement in the way in which Wales is governed, because I certainly do and I believe that the majority of people in Wales do as well?

Mr. Redwood: Of course I do not defend waste or corruption. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, if I find any I root it out and take the necessary action.

I am still waiting for the list of so-called quangos that Labour would abolish or repeal were they in office, but all that I see is a list—which grows daily—of new quangos that Labour wants to set up. The fact is that Labour would tax more and legislate more: that would be bad for British business, and for business in Wales.

Wind Generating Plants

2. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning applications there are for wind generating plants in (a) Clwyd, (b) Wales and (c) areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): The information is not held centrally.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I am sad about that, but I happen to know that there are a good many applications in my constituency and, indeed, throughout Wales.

Given that wind generation is only a modest performer in terms of energy production compared with other sustainable forms but has a huge visual impact on the environment and the amenity value of our countryside, will the Minister give me an assurance that when any of those applications are appealed against—if they are turned down by local authorities—his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will refuse them on appeal?

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I certainly cannot give the hon. Gentleman such an assurance. All cases must be considered individually, on their merits. We and the local planning authority will naturally seek to take into account all the relevant factors, including noise and siting. It is our policy to encourage wind power where it is economically attractive and environmentally acceptable.

Examination Performance

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has undertaken into value added factors related to schools' examination performance; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): My right hon. Friend and I are looking at ways in which the value added to pupils' performance and achievement by schools can best be reflected in published comparative information. In the meantime, we shall be consulting on the inclusion of a simple measure in performance tables of how each school's examination achievements change over time.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that value added, in whatever terms he can produce it, will show the achievement of both children and teachers in schools in difficult areas, which is valuable and right? Is it not also part of my hon. Friend's policy to give parents information so that parental choice can be improved? Is not parental choice crucial in education, in Wales and elsewhere? Has not the Leader of the Opposition exercised precisely that choice, using published information about schools to choose a school for his son—*[Interruption.]*—although he denies that choice to others, whatever Opposition Members may say?

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want to provide parents with as much information as possible, so that they can have as much choice as possible.

Conservative Members are not clear about the Opposition's education policy. Opposition Members say that their leader believes in grant-maintained schools, but others do not. They are making up policy on the hoof; the trouble is that the left hoof does not know what the right hoof is doing.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I am surprised that the Minister has not taken the opportunity to issue a generous withdrawal in the House of the disgraceful and untrue slur on Labour councillors that was made before Christmas. I was, however, pleased to hear that the Government are considering value added, and ways of achieving a better assessment of how schools perform.

Which of the six systems on which there has been a great deal of research so far strike the Welsh Office as the best to use in future? May I underline our own commitment to the publication of results by schools—not just raw and value added tables, but other information that will tell parents what sort of school they may be sending their children to?

Mr. Richards: There are three models under consideration for the publication of value added information for pupils. An answer will be given in due course.

Inward Investment

4. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about inward investment in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Inward investment continues to be a Welsh success story. Another £600 million was identified between April and November of last year.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that that inward investment has taken place because Wales boasts a low corporate tax regime and does not have the incubus of a minimum wage and because the country did not accept the advice to leave the European Union when it was proffered by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)?

Mr. Redwood: Those are three very important points which influence investment in Wales. I would add one other, which is the quality of the work force. That emphasises the importance of the work that we are all doing to improve education and training standards in Wales to continue the drive towards lower unemployment and more inward investment.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Does the Minister agree that for major investment projects in Britain, which includes Wales, the lead Department is the Department of Trade and Industry and the lead agency is the Invest in Britain Bureau? Is the right hon. Gentleman not concerned about the fact that there seems to be evidence that more and more major projects are being steered away from Wales by the DTI and the bureau?

Mr. Redwood: There is no evidence of that and, of course, the Welsh institutions are important in their own right in attracting business to Wales. That has been demonstrated by the recent run of announcements about investment in different parts of the United Kingdom, including Wales. The most recent large one is by the important NEG Schott and it looks as if that will come to Wales when all the details are sorted out. I hope

that they will be sorted out shortly. We are proud of Wales, which continues to attract more than its fair share of inward investment.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that inward investment in Wales would be destroyed if the Government followed policies on a minimum wage or implemented the social chapter—socialist policies which are advocated by the Labour party? What impact has inward investment had on the Welsh economy and particularly on jobs?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. Destroying flexibility for manufacturers and employers in general would put them off. We do not want a low-wage economy: we want employers to have the right to manage sensibly, as they do in Wales. Employers are increasingly attracted to Wales and often create good jobs with good salaries, which is what we are after. There are now 280 foreign manufacturers in Wales and they account for many tens of thousands of jobs.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does not the Secretary of State recognise that the kind of Thatcherite policies that he espoused in his article in today's issue of *The Guardian* would be extremely damaging to Wales's prospects of getting more inward investment in future? His analogy between the proper use of public expenditure and a spoilt child begging for more sweets is entirely inappropriate, bearing in mind the fact that young people are desperate for jobs in Wales. Does he not realise that what Wales wants is not an obsessed ideologue but someone who is prepared to fight for us in Cabinet?

Mr. Redwood: I regularly fight for Wales in and outside Cabinet and the results are there for all to see in more jobs, more investment and better public services. I shall carry on because there is still room for improvement. Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that all Wales's success in attracting inward investment has come about since 1979 under successive Conservative Governments following the policies that I outlined in *The Guardian*?

Mr. Sykes: My right hon. Friend is right about the past 15 years. Does he agree that, in 1979, Cardiff was a completely rundown city, but that anybody who cares to visit it today in 1995 will see a completely transformed major capital city? That has much to do with our reforms of the past 15 years.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right. Cardiff improved beyond recognition over the 1980s and early 1990s. There is more to do in the bay area, which I think will develop quite rapidly over the balance of this century. I look forward to that.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Secretary of State's comment about new investment stemming from 1979 shows a complete lack of understanding of the Welsh economy. Does he accept that if we are to attract inward investment we must maintain high levels of public expenditure to maintain services and improve the infrastructure and must encourage investment? It is not a matter, as the right hon. Gentleman implied in his article in this morning's issue of *The Guardian*, of calling for more extravagant confectionery from the local sweetshop.

How can he reconcile his latest views with his claim in December that a 2.9 per cent. increase in public expenditure was good for Wales and for the Welsh economy? Does he not think that he is being disingenuous by saying one thing to one audience and the opposite to a different audience? Perhaps his Cabinet colleagues had it right two weeks ago when they compared him to a mad professor tinkering in his laboratory.

Mr. Redwood: That was a pretty poor effort by the hon. Gentleman. Some people in Wales, as well as in England, read *The Guardian*. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have noticed that. I put the same views to different audiences. I am very proud of the Government's increases in spending on public services. I argued for them, agreed them with my colleagues and was pleased to announce them to the House.

I spelled out the priorities, which are there for all to see, such as police, care in the community, health, education and welfare. Those are the priorities that the Government have identified since 1979 and which I have supported all of the time that I have been part of the Government. Those are the areas on which we want to spend money. I have also identified areas of waste or unnecessary expenditure under Labour and where we have made changes. I am pleased that we have had money from privatisation because we have been able to spend it on better welfare services.

Labour Statistics

5. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are unemployed in (a) Alyn and Deeside and (b) Clwyd and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The unadjusted number for claimant unemployment in November 1994 for Alyn and Deeside was 2,380. For Clwyd it was 13,463 and for Wales it was 110,299.

Mr. Jones: Those figures are worrying and stubborn, so there must be no complacency in the Welsh Office about unemployment. Does the right hon. Gentleman know whether a Korean multinational company, Daewoo, is planning to locate a car plant in Britain? Is he and the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency holding any talks with that company? Does he agree that Deeside would be a good location for such a car plant, bearing in mind the fact that it was the runner-up in the Nissan stakes 10 years ago?

Mr. Redwood: There is certainly no complacency on my part. Unemployment has been falling rapidly for a couple of years. I welcome that, as I hope the hon. Gentleman does. I also welcome the fact that unemployment stands at 7.1 per cent. in the travel-to-work area of his constituency. That is a much better figure than for many other parts of the United Kingdom. However, we want the figure to fall considerably lower than that, as I am sure he does.

On the project that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, my current advice is that that company has no immediate plans to set up a plant anywhere in the United Kingdom. Of course, if it did we would make it very welcome. I, the chairman of the WDA and

others would be happy to talk to the company or send it any necessary materials should it firm up its intentions in the way that press rumours suggest it might.

Mr. Wigley: In view of the opportunity that the right hon. Gentleman has to express his economic and unemployment philosophy in *The Guardian*, at Tory dinner parties in southern England and on interviews on "Newsnight", why does he never mention Wales? Is it because he realises that not living in Wales, not having a mandate in Wales and not being elected by the people of Wales means that his title of Secretary of State for Wales is fraudulent? To use his words in *The Guardian* article today:

"The abuse of language is deliberately designed to mislead."

When will the right hon. Gentleman resign so that we can get someone in the job who will stand up for Wales, fight for Wales and speak about Wales when he has the opportunity to do so?

Mr. Redwood: That was an extraordinary comment. I make dozens of speeches in Wales and I make dozens of speeches about Welsh issues. I write about Welsh matters in national newspapers as well as in Welsh newspapers. The hon. Gentleman might like to see my views on Wales, which are full of policies for Wales—policies that are good for Wales and which show how much I will fight for Wales.

Mr. Rowlands: Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the serious position that thousands of people currently in receipt of invalidity benefit will face after next April? Under the Government's new incapacity test, they will be driven off that benefit, forced to join the long dole queues and will have to compete with thousands of people for poorly paid jobs. Is that a demonstration of the care and compassion of the right hon. Gentleman and his Government?

Mr. Redwood: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have often announced measures to help the disabled in Wales. I have announced additional money for disability schemes. It is important that there should be proper provision for disabled people and I have asked local government in Wales to work with me on that important matter.

On the general policy, as a Government we believe that there should be a test to ensure that a person is genuinely disabled before he receives benefit. I should have thought that that would be common ground. Of course, we want that decision to be made sensitively by independent people with good medical skills, so that the money goes to those who need it. If someone is disabled and needs help, I want to ensure that they get decent help. The way to afford that is to ensure that the help is given only to those who need it.

Mr. Sweeney: In view of the comments made earlier, does my right hon. Friend accept the appreciation of my constituents for the numerous visits that he has made to Wales and, in particular, to the Vale of Glamorgan, and for the stress that he has laid on renewing the economic success and vigour of Wales, particularly of the Vale of Glamorgan?

Mr. Redwood: I thank my hon. Friend for those generous remarks and I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate him and his wife on the birth of their first child.

M4

6. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the final cost of the Lon-Las/Earlswood section of M4 in West Glamorgan.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The final cost was £39,564,000, excluding VAT.

Mr. Ainger: Although I welcome the completion of the missing link to west Wales along the M4—obviously, it is much welcomed because it is toll-free—will the Minister explain why the Cleddau river and Severn river crossings, which were also publicly funded, are tolled? Does he accept that the Pembrokeshire economy and the whole of the south Wales economy are suffering a direct unfair tax burden as a direct result of the Severn and Cleddau bridges being tolled?

Mr. Jones: No, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's statement. I can but suggest to him that, if he were to use the new link that has been created from Lon-Las to Baglan when he visits his constituency, he will immediately perceive the obvious geographical differences between the crossing there and the Cleddau and Severn bridges. I suggest to him that his welcome for that essential link is half-hearted compared with the remarkably perceptive article in this morning's *Western Mail*, which described it as sheer magic.

Mr. Anderson: The link might be very magic but it is also very delayed. If the Minister is to give a final, accurate and comprehensive figure, will he add to that equation the estimated £180 million costs of congestion and delay? After the Labour Government had made progress on the M4, his Government failed to complete the missing link, which led to all the congestion, delay and damage to the south-west Wales economy.

Mr. Jones: What the hon. Gentleman suggests is a complete justification for our decision to spend almost £40 million on that link. He would do better to concentrate on the fact that people in his part of the world regard it as sheer magic.

NHS Efficiency

7. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to improve the efficiency of the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Richards: In 1995-96, the national health service in Wales will be required to achieve efficiency savings of 3 per cent. on cash-limited expenditure on the hospital, community and family health services. The efficiency drive that we are pursuing will be aided by the continued extension of the commissioner-provider separation during 1995.

I am pleased to announce my right hon. Friend's decision to establish a further three national health service trusts, which are to become operational from

April this year. They are the University Dental Hospital national health service trust, Cardiff Community Health Care national health service trust, and West Wales Ambulance national health service trust.

Mr. Flynn: Is not the comment of Tory deputy chairman John Maples that no one in the country will trust the Government on the health service confirmed by the experience of a constituent of mine, who was told that she could not have her urgently needed operation because the health service had run out of money in Gwent, but that, if she had been the patient of a fundholder, she could have had the money?

What does the Minister think of the comment by British Medical Association spokesman Dr. Laurence Buckman, who said that fundholders are enriching themselves with funds and that, ultimately, money given to the health service for hip operations will become part of GPs' pensions?

Mr. Richards: As usual, the hon. Gentleman talks rubbish about GP fundholding. GP fundholders are providing an excellent service for the patients of Wales. My right hon. Friend has already announced that we hope to extend the coverage of GP fundholding in Wales.

If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about his constituent, why did he not write to me about the case so that I could do something about it, rather than raise it on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Matthew Banks: May I urge my hon. Friend to reject the sometimes wildcat ideas of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn)? Does my hon. Friend agree that the improvements in efficiency in the Principality to which he referred have meant a reduction in waiting times for operations, an increase in the number of patients treated year on year and, most important, a substantial increase in the resources available to those in greatest need?

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Any efficiency saving in the NHS goes directly to patient care, which is where it should go.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Could the Minister explain how efficiency in the NHS in Wales is improved by the total demoralisation of the staff of the Powys Healthcare NHS trust, brought about by the trust's decision to secede from established pay arbitration procedures? What is his advice to workers in the trust who are to lose salary? Will he follow the Secretary of State's article in *The Guardian* and suggest that they are paid in Smarties?

Mr. Richards: The local determination of pay is a matter for the trust and those who work for it. They will come to an agreement among themselves, as happens in all other trusts. The hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the morale of people working in the NHS. I travel around a great many hospitals in Wales and can tell him that people who work in the NHS there are doing an excellent job, and that because they are doing an excellent job their morale is good. The better they do their job, the more efficient they are and the more money they will earn.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement about the three new trusts and the generally high standard in the NHS in Wales, but will he examine carefully dental services in the Bangor area as the deficiency of dental practitioners is causing considerable distress and the local family health services authority cannot cope?

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend is right to re-draw my attention to the deficiency in the number of dentists in Gwynedd and his constituency. The Welsh Office has already set aside some £50,000 to recruit community dentists. Thus far, Gwynedd FHSA has been able to recruit only one, part time, but there are many reasons why it has not been able to recruit more. More funding has been made available, but the FHSA has not seen fit to ask for it.

Mr. Morgan: While we still await the Minister's short, fat and slimy apology, will he tell us how the Secretary of State's abolition of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority will improve efficiency in the NHS in Wales? Can he confirm that, in splitting the blood transfusion service in Wales from the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, the Secretary of State will, in order to abolish one quango, end up creating another to run the blood transfusion service?

Mr. Richards: The remarks to which the hon. Gentleman refers were withdrawn by me almost immediately. As for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, an announcement will be made about its future in due course.

Commercial Property Market

8. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the commercial property market in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have not received any representations.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is high time we amended the archaic and increasingly unjust law of privity of contract which binds successive tenants in a chain of unlimited liability? Will he have a word with his colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Office and the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Jones: I share my hon. Friend's view of the law of privity, and I can tell him that my colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department intend to introduce legislation at the earliest possible opportunity.

Dr. Howells: Will the Minister examine carefully the distortions in the commercial property market in Wales, especially those arising from the huge growth in out-of-town shopping centres and the consequent decline in town and village centres where commercial properties are declining in value as the competition takes away business and they become more derelict?

Mr. Jones: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point. He knows that his view is shared by me and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We have taken opportunities recently to emphasise the guidance that is extant for local authorities when considering such situations.

Rural White Paper

9. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to issue a rural White Paper for Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend and I have no such plans.

Mr. Llwyd: Is the Minister aware that the White Paper proposed for England will have a broad remit and will consider the effect of the common agricultural policy on the rural economy? Is it not, therefore, an absolute disgrace that the matter will not be considered similarly for Wales? Do the Government not realise that large parts of Wales have a rural economy? Does the Minister agree that there is a need for an integrated rural policy which balances the economic needs of rural communities with the needs of the environment?

Mr. Jones: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman. If he knew anything about the White Paper for England, he would know that it is to cover the range of policies across a number of Government Departments. The organisation within Wales is clearly very different. I would not expect him to tell me that we should replicate what is done in England merely for the sake of replication. I remind him that we have already clearly set out the range of Welsh Office policies on rural issues in the rural initiative that we published four years ago.

Drug Education

11. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he is making with regard to drug education in schools.

Mr. Richards: We have made grants available to local education authorities for personal and social education, which includes drug education. We are currently preparing specific guidance for schools to help them develop drug education programmes and policies. We have already issued a booklet entitled "Drug Misuse and the Young" for use by those working with young people. We are setting up a drug and alcohol unit in the Welsh Office, which will develop and oversee the implementation of our strategy.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that drug education in schools must be backed up by industry, especially in relation to solvent abuse? In that regard, it would be enormously helpful if young children could see products properly labelled. Retailers must be properly guided about whether they should sell solvents, and support should be given to proper substitutes for solvents. Is my hon. Friend aware that the Department of Trade and Industry is passing the buck on the issue? We require proper co-ordination between the Department for Education, the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend's concern about solvent abuse is shared by all Conservative Members at least. I cannot comment on the Department of Trade and Industry, but I can comment on my own Department, which is self-co-ordinating.

Mr. Hain: What does the Minister intend to do about the fact that some £250,000 of Home Office funding for the drugs education programme in West Glamorgan has been abolished and has not been replaced on anything like the same scale or intensity by the unit set up in the Welsh Office? Is the Minister aware that this marks a complete abandonment by the Government of their alleged war against drugs in West Glamorgan?

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening to my answer to the main question. I said that we were setting up a drug and alcohol unit in the Welsh Office which would develop and oversee the implementation of our strategy.

Local Government

12. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the funding of local government services in Wales in 1995-96.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Several.

Mr. Hanson: Is the Minister aware that in north Wales there is widespread concern about a number of issues, especially education and the police? Is he aware that on Wednesday Clwyd county council will meet to discuss major cuts in services as a result of his settlement? Only today I learned that north Wales will lose at least 60 police officers this year because of the settlement proposed for the police force. Will the Minister review both points as a matter of urgency, as people in north Wales are concerned about the results of the settlement?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman should know that spending on education in Clwyd is a matter for Clwyd education authority. There is a change from this year in police spending throughout Wales. For the first time, the Welsh Office is involved in setting spending levels for the police authorities in Wales. Prospective standard spending assessments have been set for each of the four, and we are consulting on that before we make our final decisions.

13. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that the work of voluntary organisations is not damaged during the process of local government reorganisation in Wales.

Mr. Richards: From the outset, my right hon. Friend and I have been keen to safeguard the interests of the voluntary sector. The White Paper, "A Charter for the Future," emphasised the important role played by the sector in the delivery of local services. That message is reinforced in the guidance issued to transition committees.

In drawing up their service delivery plans for 1 April 1996, I expect authorities to consult the voluntary sector, to build on existing arrangements and to set out their strategy for working with the voluntary sector.

Mr. Michael: Those are fine words, but what does the Minister intend to do in practice? Does he not realise that local authorities are not only suffering the constraints of the tightened finances as a result of Government decisions but will bear the burden of increased costs due to reorganisation? At present, many voluntary organisations receive some money from counties and some from districts. In those straitened circumstances, how will the

Minister ensure that the finances available to many voluntary organisations are maintained and do not drop as a result of reorganisation?

Mr. Richards: The work of voluntary organisations is valued greatly, certainly on the Conservative Benches. The latest available figures for direct grants to voluntary bodies for 1993-94 is £14.1 million. In addition, there are indirect grants provided by other bodies such as education authorities and local authorities.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Asil Nadir

22. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the case of Asil Nadir.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): A warrant has been issued for the arrest of Asil Nadir. The Crown is ready to proceed when he returns or is returned to the jurisdiction.

Mrs. Roche: Given that efforts have so far failed to lead to the return of Asil Nadir from the illegal regime of occupied northern Cyprus, is it not about time that pressure was exerted on the Turkish Government, who really control the situation, or are the Government of this country are apprehensive about what Asil Nadir will reveal about secret Tory party donations?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Lady cannot have been present in the Chamber when I dealt with that question on previous occasions. We are anxious that Asil Nadir should return to this country at the earliest opportunity to stand trial, and we have encouraged him to do so. The matter of donations to party funds was considered by the Department of Trade and Industry and then by the Serious Fraud Office. The decision about the charges to be preferred against Mr. Asil Nadir was taken by the Serious Fraud Office, an independent investigating and prosecuting authority, without reference to any Ministers or to either of the Law Officers.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is a tragedy that Mr. Denktash has converted Famagusta, Kyrenia and Varosha into a costa del crime?

The Solicitor-General: As I have already said, we are very keen that Asil Nadir should come back to this country. He has nothing to fear, and we should be interested in what he has to say about the charges that have been preferred.

Brendan Smyth

23. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on his role in the case of the extradition and prosecution of Brendan Smyth.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): On 4 May 1993 I provided the Irish Attorney-General with the usual documentation in support of a request for the extradition of Father Brendan Smyth. Father Smyth subsequently returned voluntarily to Northern Ireland, appeared in court on 21 January 1994 and was later sentenced to four years imprisonment for offences of child abuse.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Attorney-General explain why Cardinal Cahal Daly, in his detailed statement, reported that Brendan Smyth had been interviewed by the Royal Ulster Constabulary early in 1990 in connection with child abuse complaints, that the priest had admitted wrongdoing, but was not arrested? Why did it take from then until early 1993 for the Attorney-General to seek his arrest and extradition and why did not he press with his opposite number in Dublin for an early extradition following that notice being served on the Garda?

The Attorney-General: To take the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question first, as the hon. Gentleman knows since his holiday in Ireland and his 25 questions to the House on this subject, officials in my Department did press on three occasions, in September, October and November 1993. Returning to the earlier time, however, there were indeed investigations by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in 1990 and 1991 and into 1992. It was hoped and expected at that time that Brendan Smyth would present himself for arrest in Northern Ireland. That did not take place and it then became necessary to prepare the extradition papers. Further events or suspicions of criminality arose in early 1993.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that when I tabled a question on these matters he referred me to the answers that he had already given to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and that the information has been published in Dublin and elsewhere on several occasions when my right hon. and learned Friend's office pushed for the extradition papers to be processed? Will he also confirm that it is quite normal, in sad cases like this, for the priest, minister or vicar concerned to make himself available to the police, and that it is rare for the person concerned to go outside the jurisdiction?

The Attorney-General: On both points, I confirm what my hon. Friend has said. There was a real expectation, or at least a real hope, that Brendan Smyth would make himself available in the early stages. As for the detail of the matter, those who wish to read it can do so in extenso in the papers referred to by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Trimble: The Attorney-General referred to the reminders that were sent by his office to the Irish on a monthly basis. Were they just reminders, or did they actually press for action? If it was the latter, what response was received from the Irish authorities? What did the official in Dublin, who we are told was dealing with the matter, say to the Attorney-General? Did the Irish at any stage raise technical legal objections? Did they at any stage refer to the earlier Duggan case?

The Attorney-General: Again, the hon. Gentleman can read about that in great detail. They were actually personal representations by my office to the office of the Irish Attorney-General.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The key charge against the Attorney-General in this matter is that he was so laid back as to be horizontal in respect of what is a very grave matter. Can he confirm that, in the eight months between April 1993 and January 1994, when Mr. Smyth, or Father Smyth, voluntarily surrendered himself to the Northern Irish authorities, no action had been taken by the Irish Government? Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman not think that it was time for him to intervene personally?

How much longer after that eight months would he have allowed this grave matter to drag on without bothering to intervene himself?

The Attorney-General: I think that the hon. Gentleman, whom I welcome to his new post on the Opposition Front Bench, has spent more time on working out his question than on reading the background. He will discover that not only did I send the detailed statements of facts and law in May 1993, but that that was followed up by my Department, as I have said, in September, October and November 1993. There were also contacts through other offices and agencies involved. It was clear at the end of November 1993 that Brendan Smyth was likely to come back of his own accord. That was communicated to Dublin in December 1993, and the rest is history.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I was in fact calling Mr. Anderson to ask question No. 24. This is an example of how Front-Bench Members can sometimes have two bites at the cherry while Back Benchers do not get any of the cherry. I must now tell the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) that I assume that he has asked question No. 24 and a Back Bencher should have an opportunity.

Mr. Anderson: I drop my earlier question.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. I call Mr. Dowd. As he is not here, I call Mr. Cyril D. Townsend.

War Crimes Act 1991

27. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to bring prosecutions under the War Crimes Act 1991.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has referred the cases of seven potential defendants to Treasury counsel for advice. The papers are voluminous and complex. They will be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Mr. Townsend: Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the House what changes will have to be made to the law of the land to deal with the problems of evidence in cases which go back more than 50 years? Is he yet in a position to explain that no one will go to prison after that very expensive and elaborate business?

The Attorney-General: To take the second part of my hon. Friend's question first, as he will appreciate, the question of anybody going to prison will depend, first, on there being prosecutions and, secondly, on there being convictions. One should not jump those guns. Both will depend on evidence. A case will not be brought unless there is sufficient evidence to give a realistic prospect of conviction.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Whether or not there are prosecutions, does the Attorney-General recognise that there is great concern that such matters have taken so long to be processed? Will he encourage Treasury counsel and whoever else is involved to supply their opinions quickly, so that a decision can be reached with the utmost dispatch?

The Attorney-General: Yes, indeed. I recognise and share exactly the hon. and learned Gentleman's view. It is well understood by Treasury counsel. It is a detailed matter, but it has been given close, urgent and careful attention.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid Policy

30. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement defining the Government's policy as to how, and to what extent, aid should be tied to trade.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): We give aid to promote economic and social development in other countries. Wherever practical, we aim to use United Kingdom goods and services to achieve that.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister reflect that there is now widespread public opinion that it is an abuse of the aid programme to tie it to trade, particularly when such projects include metro systems in Ankara, in a state which is an applicant member of the European Union? Should not aid be related exclusively to waging war on poverty and promoting health and education?

Mr. Baldry: Aid and trade provision was established by the Labour Government in 1977. Like much of Labour party policy, however, it is obviously re-written by the day. ATP has enabled the United Kingdom to promote development in areas where British companies have much to offer. It is a successful scheme. It is successful in helping poorer countries. It is successful also in that the £1.4 billion which has been committed to support development in poorer countries has led to nearly £4 billion of British exports, which must be good news for Britain, for British jobs and for countries which have benefited from such projects. Not surprisingly, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee concluded that ATP should continue.

Mr. Waterson: What is my hon. Friend's view of the Opposition's point that one should never make defence sales to countries that are in receipt of British aid? Has he figures to show the number of British jobs that would be lost if such a policy were adopted?

Mr. Baldry: It would be a bizarre approach if the Opposition suggested that we should never contemplate defence sales in countries to which we give aid. We would be entitled to ask how many employees of companies such as British Aerospace, GEC, Rolls-Royce, Racal, Perkins, Vickers and hundreds of other United Kingdom defence exporters would accept losing their jobs for such specious dogma.

Miss Lestor: First, may I correct what has been said? We have always argued that arms sales should not be linked to aid. That is a very different statement.

Secondly, as the Minister is aware, fewer than a third of ATP applications in 1989-90 and 1990-91 were granted. Surely other ATP projects could have been funded if the

Government had not gone ahead with the Pergau dam project. Is it not therefore disgraceful, as many people constantly point out, for the Government to say that they cannot restore the money that has already been spent on Pergau and on other projects? The pathetic excuse constantly trotted out is that the system of annual budgets means that the books for those years have been closed. Much good could have been done and could still be done if the Government would restore that money.

Mr. Baldry: First, the House will be grateful to the hon. Lady for setting out Labour party policy. As Labour party policy seems to change by the day, we are grateful for daily updates. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made the position in respect of money from the court judgment absolutely clear before Christmas. It is clear, and I am surprised that the hon. Lady has difficulty with it. We decided that funding from the reserve will be provided to meet the costs of four projects, thus releasing an extra £34.5 million this year and £31 million next year for overseas development. Every reasonable hon. Member would consider that to be an equitable solution.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Are not four-wheel drive British vehicles such as those made by Rover and also British technology in agriculture, the water industry and many public utilities vital to developing countries? Is it not good for Britain and for the developing countries if, in the process of granting such aid, we tie in trade for Britain? Does that not show the hypocrisy of the Opposition?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We work with British companies and consultants, as we do with British non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam and the Save the Children fund, because they provide the advice, know-how, products and experience which are of benefit to the development of the countries that we help. We should be proud that British money, talent and expertise are devoted to helping many of the poorest people in the world.

31. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria he uses to allocate overseas aid.

Mr. Baldry: We give aid where it will be most effective in promoting sustainable economic and social development, focused on the poorest countries, particularly in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Prentice: Does the Minister not appreciate the bewilderment of people that the largest single slice of overseas aid should go to Malaysia, a country which exports cars to the United Kingdom? Is there not a case for refocusing our aid effort to those parts of the world which are poverty-stricken and which need the support that we can give them?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman should first read the statistics on British overseas aid for 1994. He might then pose a more accurate question. Nine of the 10 biggest aid recipients last year were poor countries in Africa and Asia, while Bosnia was the other main recipient. We have a substantial aid programme of some £2.2 billion which has been praised for its quality. The programme is focused on helping the poorest in the world, and we can all be proud of it.

Mr. Ottaway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the aid budget is a growing and quality budget, and that it is flexible in addressing human crises? But would not the budget be better distributed on a sectoral rather than a regional basis? That would be particularly applicable in relation to population policy.

Mr. Baldry: It is indeed a large budget of some £2.2 billion and we are the sixth largest aid donor worldwide. It is growing, and the next three years will see year-on-year increases in the aid budget. It is a quality budget. Christian Aid recently commented:

"The UK has capacity and considerable experience both in development and in the management of crises. The quality of the UK's overall contribution to long-term development is recognised to be high."

That is one of the leading NGOs commenting on UK aid.

In addition to giving money to the poorest countries, we also discuss their aid programmes with them. We seek to do that on seven principles, including support of economic reform, helping to achieve good government, enhancing productive capacity and financing activities which directly benefit poor people. Those are set out in detail in the ODA annual review. We recognise that we must promote particular policies as well as helping poor countries.

Baltic Know-how Fund

32. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new plans he has to extend the work of the know-how fund in the Baltic states.

Mr. Baldry: The know-how fund will continue to provide rapid and flexible assistance to the reform process in the Baltic states. The countries concerned very much welcome our support.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that since power was devolved from Moscow to Riga, Tallin and Vilnius, the know-how fund has made a marvellous contribution—it is a small contribution, but important—to the growth in the self-confidence and the economies of the Baltic states?

As Estonia has a smaller population than Wales and Latvia has a smaller population than Scotland, would it not be worthwhile to use the know-how fund to set up a small seminar for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet so that he and they can know how devolution liberates, unifies and creates prosperity?

Mr. Baldry: That was a good try. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the first part of his question, which fairly summarised the advantages of the know-how fund and its contribution to helping the transformation of state-run communist societies to market-led, pluralist democracies in eastern Europe. However, he rather spoilt it by the second part.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend tell the House whether people in eastern European countries are asking about privatisation? Is he as pleased as I was that the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) was so loud in his praise of privatisation when we were in Romania together? The hon. Gentleman seemed more enthusiastic about privatisation taking place than I was.

Mr. Baldry: The Labour party may be somewhat embarrassed by the know-how fund. The aim of part of it is to assist privatisation in eastern Europe. All those countries have recognised the need to move to market

economies while the Labour party is still grappling with whether it wants to abandon the 1918 commitment to the public ownership of all means of production, distribution and exchange.

Palestine Liberation Organisation (Aid)

33. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid Britain has given to the PLO in 1994; and how much will be given in 1995.

Mr. Baldry: Our aid to the Palestinians is not given to the Palestine Liberation Organisation. In 1994 we spent approximately £12 million bilaterally and through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Mr. Janner: I thank the Minister for that reply and for his recognition that it is vital that we give aid to the Palestinians by one route or another if the middle east peace process is to continue. On that strain, does he recognise that some 75 per cent. of the population of Jordan are Palestinians? In view of their courageous and skilful entry into the peace process, will he arrange for the write-off of the Jordanian debt to Britain, which in any event will not be repaid to? This is the right time to make that gesture.

Mr. Baldry: In a sense, we have done as the hon. and learned Gentleman asks. Following the Washington declaration by Israel and Jordan, all aid debts owed by Jordan to Britain have been written off. The agreement to bring that into effect was signed on 11 December last year. I hope that that is good news for the hon. and learned Gentleman. We recognise that Jordan, having concluded its own bilateral peace treaty with Israel, has made a significant contribution to the peace process in the middle east. That is why all aid debts owed by Jordan to Britain have been written off.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: First, I have a short statement to make. Hon. Members all seem to be armed with "Erskine May". Perhaps someone will arm me with a copy.

I have a short statement to make about the arrangements for tabling questions to the Secretary of State for Wales for Monday 13 February. Under the normal arrangements for oral questions, such questions would have to be tabled in person by Members on Monday 30 January. I understand that a meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee in Cardiff is being arranged for that day. It will clearly be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for members of that Committee to table questions here at Westminster before 5 pm that day.

In those circumstances, I am prepared on this one occasion to relax the rule requiring oral questions to be tabled in person by a Member. Members of the Welsh Grand Committee may therefore send their oral questions by post to the Table Office or have them handed in by a secretary or research assistant, provided of course that they are signed by a Member.

For the avoidance of doubt, I wish to make it clear that this concession applies only to those Members who are on the Welsh Grand Committee. It does not extend to any other Member who may wish to table a question to the Secretary of State for Wales. I trust that those responsible for arranging these matters will ensure that such a clash of events does not reoccur.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): May I thank you, Madam Speaker, on behalf of all those Members who represent Welsh constituencies. If the Secretary of State for Wales had acceded to our request for an earlier meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee, we would not have been put in this impossible position. I am grateful. I know that all my colleagues share my appreciation of the discretion that you have shown.

Dr. Spink: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You mentioned "Erskine May". I know that you have such wisdom that you do not need day-to-day reference to "Erskine May". I seek your advice on whether it is possible to invoke the provisions detailed on page 678, which enable the House to call individuals before the Bar so that we can question Mr. Alastair Campbell in his new, unelected role as the only person now free to speak on Opposition policy.

Madam Speaker: I doubt whether it is a point of order for me. Coming before the Bar is a question of privilege. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue it as a matter of privilege, perhaps he will write to me in the normal way.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I have a brief point of order in relation to your statement, Madam Speaker. It will be welcome, in relation to not only your generosity, but the flexibility that you have shown in responding to the problem and also your perspicacity in noticing that a large part of Welsh questions is taken up by a conspiracy of English Conservative Members of Parliament, who tend to crowd out Welsh Members as a result.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The whole House understands why, although you were elected as a Labour Member of Parliament, you are not able to talk on issues and policies. As has been said, we also understand that you set an example that the whole House should follow. However, can you explain why every Labour Member of Parliament has now decided not to talk about policies and issues and has instead decided to delegate that matter to someone else? How can the House have a constructive debate on issues of importance to the country with an invisible Opposition, who will not set out their policies?

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for me. It may be a point of debate—if we ever get into a debate through these points of order.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I make two points of order about written answers?

On today's Order Paper, for example, my question No. 7 for written answer, whose named day for answer is today, relates to dates of publication of documents by the Secretary of State for Health. Question No. 398, in the name of the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), which is also tabled for written answer today, is on an entirely different issue, but one that is of relevance to my constituency and neighbouring constituencies in south London: what is happening to the South Thames training and enterprise council, which has gone bust.

It is now, I think unintentionally, the case that written answers are available to the press before they are available to the Members who have tabled the questions, or are available—as in the case of the second question that I cited—to the Member who has tabled what is often a planted question considerably in advance of their being available to the Members whose constituencies are directly affected by the question.

I apologise for the fact that I have not given you notice of the point of order, Madam Speaker, and I do not expect you to rule immediately, but it seems to me that you have always enunciated the principle that Members affected should be told first. I should be grateful if you would, after investigation, give a ruling that, if an hon. Member tables a question for written answer, he or she is told before the press and others, or, if a question directly affects a constituency, the hon. Member concerned does not learn about the matter after another Member with no interest in it and the press, and then only considerably later.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows me well enough to know that I have very firm and strong views about the matter which I will not enunciate at this stage, but I will look at it very carefully and make a statement to the House about it.

Several hon. Members *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: I am quite capable, Lady Olga, of determining who to call, thank you.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I, too, apologise for not giving you notice of this point of order, Madam Speaker, but it arises out of the point that was

[Mr. Alan Haselhurst]

just raised. If it is a question of the overlapping of interests between Members and their constituencies, and if you are going to make a ruling, will you clarify the position of hon. Members visiting other hon. Members' constituencies, and whether due and proper notice should be given to those hon. Members?

Madam Speaker: I have always made it clear that, when Members visit other Members' constituencies, they should certainly inform them as a matter of courtesy.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the current debate on devolution and the accusation by the Prime Minister of "teenage madness" among those advocating such devolution, will you draw the attention of Conservative Members to the fact that they are about to vote—presumably in favour—on the motion at the top of page 1068 in the name of the Leader of the House: that the matter of the Welsh economy is a matter relating exclusively to Wales?

Madam Speaker: That is barely a point of order for me. Questions on the Order Paper should come to the attention of hon. Members each day as they read the Order Paper.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): On the question of notice, Madam Speaker, in which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) seems to be interested, can you give some guidance on whether it is in order for hon. Members to mention another hon. Member who has asked a question in the course of his parliamentary activities, having given no notice to the hon. Member concerned and having made various presumptive comments about that hon. Member?

Madam Speaker: I shall be glad to look at the whole matter and tell the House how Members should behave. Frankly, however, it is a matter of common sense, and rulings from the Chair should not be necessary when it comes to applying common sense.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): May I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker, in assisting the orderly nature of oral questions? At Welsh Questions today—we have had similar problems in the past with the Home Office—the issue of Ministers' responsibility for policy or operational matters arose. The Minister said that I did not write to him on a matter. As you know, that matter is operational and I have written to the health authority about it. There is a real difficulty because, having had a negative reply from the health authority, I then brought up the question here today.

It is the proper function of a Member of Parliament to raise matters of policy here. As I could not raise a point of order at Question Time when the accusation was made, the accusation grew legs and ran away. We are placed in difficulty when we are accused of not properly representing our constituents. May we have a ruling for Ministers on what is an operational as opposed to a policy matter, because many of us would like to know what Ministers are responsible for, if anything?

Madam Speaker: I have no doubt that the Welsh Office will have taken on board what the hon. Gentleman has said and may even be helpful. But he must pursue those matters with the Secretary of State, not through me.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I point out to you—you probably noticed it yourself—that the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) was not listening when my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) spoke and had to be alerted to the fact that he should have listened to the subsequent question? He was not doing so and his colleague had to tell him what had been said. He then got it all wrong.

Madam Speaker: I try to keep my eye on everyone in the Chamber, but it is not always possible. I do my best.

BILLS PRESENTED

Water Charges (Amendment)

Mr. Paul Tyler, supported by Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Nick Harvey, Mr. Don Foster, Mr. Simon Hughes and Mrs. Diana Maddock, presented a Bill to amend the Water Industry Act 1991 to prohibit the use by water undertakers of rateable values as a basis for charging from 31 March 1996; to provide for charging by water undertakers in accordance with council tax bands; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 20 January, and to be printed. [Bill 33.]

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That the Matter of the Welsh economy, being a Matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Orders of the Day

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, perhaps it will be helpful if I state that it may be convenient if the Second Reading, the committal motion and the instruction in the name of the Leader of the Opposition are debated together, with an opportunity for a Division, if desired, at 10 o'clock. I am afraid that I shall not be able to call the instruction in the name of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), but the points contained in it are in order for debate on Second Reading.

3.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, if it meets with parliamentary approval, will lead to the construction of one of the longest and most ambitious pieces of infrastructure to be built this century. The high-speed rail link will be a project of major national significance and will provide Britain with a modern and fast link with the rest of Europe.

The Bill provides powers for the construction, maintenance and operation of the link between St. Pancras in London and the channel tunnel in Kent. The Bill includes powers for associated works, including a connection to provide access to Waterloo international station, connections to other existing lines, provision in outline for a station at Ebbsfleet in Kent, the construction of an open box that could accommodate a station at Stratford, and the alteration and extension of St. Pancras, including advance works for Thameslink. It will also secure the powers to widen the A2 at Cobham and the M2 between junctions 1 and 4 on the outskirts of the Medway towns.

The new railway will bring great benefits to the whole country. It will more than double the capacity for international passenger trains between this country and the continent of Europe; reduce journey times for both international and domestic trains; enable the provision of entirely new express commuter services to several parts of Kent; boost regeneration in the Thames gateway and east Kent; and enhance capacity for rail freight from every part of the nation to the continent. Some £1.5 billion has already been spent on trains, tracks and stations for railway services through the channel tunnel.

Right hon. and hon. Members who have travelled on Eurostar have already enjoyed the benefits of that investment. They will also appreciate the huge likely demand for those services. Eventually, more capacity will be needed. The rail link, with an additional terminus at St. Pancras, will meet that demand.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will make a little progress.

The new line will cut journey times from Paris to London by half an hour to 2.5 hours. The journey time to Brussels will be cut to two hours and 10 minutes, once the Belgians have their new fast line. The time savings will spread the demand and the benefits still further, because they will widen the area of the country for which the journey time by rail will be competitive with air travel.

Paris to Birmingham—city centre to city centre—will come down to 4.5 hours; towns and cities served by the east coast main line will benefit from an hour's reduction in journey time. Paris to Peterborough will take only 3.5 hours.

The new line may take freight, although it is designed principally as a high-speed passenger railway. Taking passenger traffic on to the new line means more room for freight on the existing network. That will present new opportunities to shift freight from the roads.

Together with the privatisation of British Rail, the channel tunnel rail link will give a major boost to rail freight. That is a key benefit for the whole country. Some 70 per cent. of freight trains through the channel tunnel are expected to have origins and destinations beyond London. It makes environmental sense for as much freight as possible to be taken on rail right through to the regions.

In the south-east, the new line provides other important benefits, particularly for Kent. Express commuter services will be taken on the new line, transforming the travelling lives of rail users from an area that is currently served by the slowest of London's commuter trains. Gravesend will see journey times to London cut from 50 minutes to 20, and Ashford from 75 minutes to 40.

The Government are keen to see the rail link act as a focus for regeneration, particularly of the Thames gateway and east Kent. That is one of the main reasons why we chose an easterly approach to London. Estimates of growth in the area around Ebbsfleet station, for example, are for 45,000 new jobs and 30,000 additional homes.

Likewise, the London terminus at St. Pancras can be expected to stimulate the regeneration of the surrounding area. That provides an excellent example of the Government's policy of encouraging development around major public transport centres, with ensuing economic and environmental benefits.

Mr. Robert Jackson: My right hon. Friend was listing the benefits of the channel tunnel and the rail link. Will he include among them confirmation of the view of his predecessors—that it was unnecessary and inappropriate to have any further green field airport developments, such as that apparently envisaged for my constituency?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is moving the boundaries of the debate slightly wider than that included in the Bill, but I understand his concern and would be happy to talk to him about it if he would like to take up that opportunity.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): Clearly, this is the greatest opportunity that we have had this century of shifting freight from road to rail. Will my right hon. Friend look again at Trafford park, in my Manchester constituency? Currently, we already have six freight trains a night in each direction coming through the tunnel, bound for Trafford park, and the Euro-terminal, so recently opened at the eastern end of Trafford park, is threatened with closure due to the problems of noise and what many

[Mr. Winston Churchill]

people regard as the unrealistic level at which the noise requirement has been set, which is quite impossible for rail freight to meet.

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend raises an important point, one that he has already brought to Ministers' attention. It is complicated by the fact that there is a local authority involvement in the issue, but I will ask my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads to look at the point that he has raised.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Secretary of State will recall that, when the route via the eastern approach was first announced, his predecessor said that its purpose was regeneration—which the Secretary of State rightly mentioned—but that that regeneration was intended for east London. Given that the Government have made it clear that there should always be a Stratford option, can the right hon. Gentleman explain why the Bill contains powers for Ebbsfleet, but only an indication of the long trench—which he mentioned—and no powers for Stratford? Surely that is an inequity in option terms.

Dr. Mawhinney: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not feel that. The Bill specifically makes it possible for a station to be there, but—as the hon. Gentleman pointed out—the option has been left open. That is a requirement of the promoters for bidding purposes. We shall form a judgment on the basis of the bids that are made in March.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I will give way, but I must then make progress.

Mr. O'Brien: Has the Secretary of State considered the question of the east line? Wakefield district council is developing its rail terminal in my constituency, which is important to the area's economy—it will mean 6,000 or 10,000 jobs in the surrounding rail freight village—but we need an assurance from the Secretary of State that freight can be moved quickly from the Yorkshire area through the tunnel.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am aware of the proposal. As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, it is being considered seriously.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I will, but this must be the last time.

Mr. Haselhurst: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Following the intervention of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), does my right hon. Friend accept that hon. Members on both sides of the House support furtherance of the concept of an interchange station at Stratford? I believe that the strategy of the eastern approach, which I wholly applaud, will be boosted if rail connections from the whole of East Anglia can be plugged in at Stratford.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the point made by both my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). It was I who announced the decision that the Stratford option would remain on the table. We shall respond to the bids, examine them and in due course reach a judgment; but Stratford remains a possibility.

The channel tunnel rail link will have an impact on the environment. As with roads, nearly 68 miles of brand-new railway cannot be built painlessly, but considerable efforts have been made to identify a route that minimises environmental damage. The Government believe that the benefits of the new railway far outweigh any detrimental impact; we also want the environmental impact to be mitigated as far as reasonably possible.

The Government have insisted that the project's developers must meet the environmental standards applied to all other major transport infrastructure projects. I believe that that objective has been achieved, first by careful route selection—the length of the route that we are discussing was considered 10 times, and nine tenths was rejected, much of it on environmental grounds—and secondly by incorporating mitigation in the design.

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I shall do so shortly; I should like to make some progress first.

Extensive use has been made of existing transport corridors. Twenty-one per cent. of the route is in tunnel; 85 per cent. of the link either follows an existing transport corridor such as the M20, or runs in tunnel.

As evidence of the importance that we attach to the environment, the Government, through Union Railways, commissioned a full environmental assessment of the rail link proposals. An environmental statement of the findings of that assessment was laid before Parliament and published on 17 November last year. The assessment process will continue throughout consideration of the Bill. I commend the comprehensive work undertaken by Union Railways and its environmental consultants for its thoroughness and professionalism.

I know that the environmental statement will be of interest to right hon. and hon. Members who are particularly concerned about the noise impact of the new link and the mitigation that will be provided. I also recognise the concerns about noise from the intensified use of existing lines and the fact that the Select Committee may wish to examine intensification which might result from the new rail link. However, I hope that the Select Committee will not extend its remit to intensification generally caused by the channel tunnel, as that was considered and dealt with by Parliament when passing the Channel Tunnel Act 1987.

Sir Michael Neubert: I am sorry that I sought to intervene earlier so soon after other interventions. My point relates to the environment. As my right hon. Friend knows, the chosen route is through the London borough of Havering and in particular passes through the constituency of my neighbour, the Under-Secretary of State for Schools, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire). His ministerial responsibilities consign him to silence on this occasion. However, he is in his place and believes, as I and the council do, that the route through Rainham should be about 150 m south of what is proposed.

That is a point of detail, but the general point is that there is apprehension that the Select Committee will not be willing to consider petitions which seek to vary the

route by more than a minimum. Will the Minister assure me that a counter-proposal such as that by the council of a movement of about 150 m would be considered under petition by the Select Committee?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am aware of the concern of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Schools, who is in his place on the Treasury Bench. In an entirely appropriate way in his capacity as a Member of Parliament he has made me aware of the concern of his constituents. The House will understand that it is not for me to determine or predetermine what the Select Committee should do about a petition which may or may not be submitted.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The Secretary of State has outlined his sensitivity about the loss of aural amenity resulting from the project. Will he make comparable references and express the hope that the Committee will examine the loss of visual amenity, especially in west Thurrock, where the route would be on a viaduct of a height comparable to that of the Galleries in the Chamber? It will clearly blight many properties because it will overlook them and their gardens and will clearly make it impossible for people to sell those properties.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point on behalf of his constituents, even if he over-eggs it a little. It would be slightly difficult to disguise a viaduct to make it look like anything other than a viaduct.

A recent Europewide study of high-speed rail networks emphasised the clear environmental advantages of high-speed rail over road and air transport, particularly in terms of energy efficiency, lower air pollution emissions and less land take. It would be a mistake to believe that all the environmental impacts associated with the rail link are negative. For example, the grade 1 listed St. Pancras station will be refurbished. The channel tunnel rail link creates a long-term future for this outstanding example of Victorian railway architecture.

The Bill contains a widening scheme for the A2-M2 between Cobham and junction 4. That is to relieve congestion on an important strategic route. My hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and the local authorities concerned urged the Government to include the widening scheme in the Bill. They particularly wanted to see the two new viaducts over the Medway constructed at the same time. We concluded, for sound environmental reasons, that the M2 scheme should be included in the Bill and should stand as part of the Bill's principle.

An environmental statement for the widening scheme was published on the same day as the statement for the rail link. It too is based on a thorough and professional environmental assessment conducted by independent consultants. There has also been an assessment of the combined effects of the road and rail schemes.

I shall now turn to the route of the rail link and begin by describing the process of route development and consultation. This demonstrates that the route contained in the Bill was selected only after the most thorough consideration. The broad corridor for an easterly approach to London was chosen in 1991 following a comparative study of four major options. It was not the cheapest option, but the decision attracted all-party support.

The easterly route was then refined by comparing and sifting all the possible local route variations, taking account of environmental appraisals and soundings with local authorities, after which Union Railways presented a range of options following an easterly approach to London.

In March 1993, the Government selected a route for consultation, which again was not the cheapest of the options and which as a minimum met the environmental standards that apply to other major transport infrastructure projects in this country. In January 1994, and after formal public consultation that lasted more than six months, the then Secretary of State for Transport confirmed the route, with some enhancements. After further studies and consultation for two route sections he finalised the Government's chosen route in April last year.

It would be unrealistic to expect everyone to be satisfied with the route in the Bill, given that the railway has to run through environmentally sensitive and, in some sections, densely populated areas of Kent, Essex and London. However, decisions have not been taken lightly. Those who remained aggrieved throughout the process have had a proper opportunity to make their cases—leading the Government, in some instances, to reconsider earlier decisions before settling finally on what should be included in the Bill.

Because the route development, consultation and decision-making processes have been so full and painstaking, and because proper environmental standards have been used throughout, I do not believe that the Select Committee need spend time considering options outside the limits of deviation set down by the Bill for the terminus and route.

The London terminus, the existing St. Pancras station, will be extended and enlarged to provide separate accommodation for international and domestic services and for midland main line services. Physical connections will be provided with the east coast and west coast main lines to allow direct through services from the rail link to Scotland, the north of England and the midlands.

A grade-separated junction is provided as the rail link leaves St. Pancras. East of the Caledonian road, the rail link will run in bored tunnel to an open box within the Stratford railway lands. That will accommodate an emergency crossover and evacuation facility and a connection to a possible depot at Temple Mills.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Will my right hon. Friend assure me and the House that the Government's position remains that it would be possible in the future, within the terms of the Bill, for there to be a junction between the channel tunnel rail link and the proposed cross-rail link?

Dr. Mawhinney: As my hon. Friend may know, that proposal is not in the Bill. However, it remains a possibility for the promoters of both projects to agree to move in that direction if they are so minded.

The open box would also provide scope in the future for a station at Stratford. As I made clear to the House last year, the option of a station at Stratford remains open. A final decision will depend on our review of the bids from the four bidding consortiums when they are received.

Leaving Stratford, the rail link will continue in tunnel, emerging alongside the existing London-Tilbury-Southend line to the east of Barking station. The link will

[Dr. Mawhinney]

then follow the LTS corridor. Near the Ripple lane freightliner terminal a connection will be provided to allow freight to join and leave the link.

The railway will continue along the LTS corridor, past the inner-Thames marshes and past the Mardyke housing estate on a viaduct. A second viaduct will take the rail link over the M25 and under the approach to the Queen Elizabeth II bridge. The rail link will then enter tunnel to pass beneath West Thurrock marshes and the River Thames.

The link will emerge from the Thames tunnel at Swanscombe marshes, where there will be a permanent maintenance depot. The Bill provides in outline for a combined international and domestic passenger station at Ebbsfleet with parking and access to the A2 close to the M25. A connecting line to the north Kent line at Ebbsfleet will enable trains from the Medway towns to join the link for fast running into St. Pancras.

The rail link will pass under the A2 at Pepper Hill. There is provision for the disused Gravesend west line to be reinstated to provide a connection between the link and the Longfield to Swanley line, so that international passenger trains on the railway can use the international terminal at Waterloo. The rail link will then run parallel to the A2-M2, with provision for possible freight passing loops south of Singlewell.

There will be an additional viaduct over the Medway, parallel to the existing one. The rail link will then switch from the M2 corridor to the M20 corridor by entering a two-mile long tunnel under the north downs, then running largely on the surface to the north of Maidstone. The route will then run parallel to the M20, diverging for a short distance at Sandway. There is provision for possible passing loops at Charing Heath. The rail link will then leave the M20 corridor to run towards the centre of Ashford, where the line will widen to four tracks so that connections can be made with the international passenger station currently under construction. The rail link will then run parallel to the existing railway out of Ashford to Dollands Moor, where there is provision for a possible connection to the freight inspection facility. The railway will then enter Eurotunnel's terminal at Cheriton.

Last year, I described the channel tunnel rail link as a great example of co-operation between the Government and the private sector. The rail link will be built, owned and maintained by a private sector promoter. In June, we shortlisted four bidding consortia; they are now preparing their tenders, for submission on 14 March. We have set certain minimum requirements—an important one of which is consistency with the Bill—but, within those constraints, we are looking for imaginative responses from the private sector. I expect to announce the winner in the latter half of this year. If Parliament approves the Bill, I shall use its powers to designate the winning consortium as the "nominated undertaker" of the rail link.

I turn now and briefly to the structure of the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Before my right hon. Friend leaves that passage, will he clear up a possible misunderstanding? In response to one of my hon. Friends, he said that it was not for him to predetermine how a Select Committee might respond to a petition. He then said that he saw no need for the Select Committee to consider anything outside the limits of deviation. As he knows, this matter is of considerable concern to Kent Members and to hon. Members representing regions covered by other parts of the track. We should be grateful if he would make it clear that he does not intend to give advice to the Select Committee.

Dr. Mawhinney: May I clarify that, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert), I said that I would not prejudge on the basis of a petition that might or might not be brought before the Select Committee? I made the Government's position clear. I am in a position to offer advice and guidance to a Select Committee, but I am not instructing it.

On the structure of the Bill, much of its content is well precedented in previous private and hybrid legislation, not least in the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, and in my Department's model clauses for railways and tramways. Part I deals with the rail link. It includes provisions authorising its construction, maintenance and operation and associated works by the "nominated undertaker". The House will note, however, that the compulsory acquisition powers are conferred on the Secretary of State, and that all the usual protections and provisions as to compensation for people whose land, property or rights are compulsorily acquired or injuriously affected will apply.

Part I also gives planning approval for the rail link and establishes a special planning regime, under which various detailed matters are left for subsequent approval by the relevant local authority. There is to be a planning memorandum to accompany the Bill, and local authorities that are willing to abide by the terms of the memorandum will enjoy extended planning powers.

Part I also provides a special regime for heritage matters. Here, too, it is our intention that the relevant statutory bodies, especially English Heritage, and local authorities will have a role through an agreement outside the Bill. On planning and heritage matters, there has been widespread consultation and discussion with the affected local planning authorities and interested statutory bodies over the course of the last year. Those discussions continue.

Part I also includes the public clauses for the rail link, which establish the regulatory regime for the rail link and make provision in respect of the competition and finance, as well as covering a number of general subjects, including the "nominated undertaker" powers, which I have mentioned already.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I wanted to catch the attention of my right hon. Friend before he left part I to ask about clauses 30 and 31. How will the impact of section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act, which forbids the Secretary of State or the public sector from financing the channel tunnel, be protected so that the Dover ferry industry will continue to receive protection? Will he give an assurance that clauses 30 and 31 will in no way result in additional and extra subsidy going into the channel tunnel?

Dr. Mawhinney: I believe that my hon. Friend will find that the financial contributions relate to the domestic rather than the international aspect. If I have misremembered, I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State to refine my answer later, should he catch your eye, Madam Speaker. I think, however, that I have accurately remembered the arrangement.

The regulatory regime for the rail link will be designed for the particular circumstances of the project. It will reflect the substantial financial commitment of the private sector and the risks that it will be bearing. It will also reflect the fact that the rail link will be in competition not only with other forms of transport but with other railways. The regulatory regime will therefore complement the regime set out in the Railways Act 1993, but with some significant modifications to reflect the rail link's unique circumstances.

Part II of the Bill provides for the Secretary of State the powers for a 10.5 m widening of the A2 at Cobham and the M2 between junctions 1 and 4 on the outskirts of the Medway towns. Widening will be contained entirely within the existing highway corridor. A second motorway bridge across the River Medway will be built upstream of the existing bridge to provide four lanes for London-bound traffic.

Part III of the Bill contains miscellaneous and general provisions, including the financial provisions in clause 49.

The Bill is hybrid. Subject to the House granting the Bill a Second Reading and approving the committal motion, the Bill will be referred to a Select Committee for consideration of petitions against it. Separate Select Committees of the House and of another place will consider the effects of the rail and road schemes on the interests of those directly affected.

It is for the Select Committees to decide on the scope of their consideration; the Government can only offer guidance in such matters. In response to requests and to be helpful, the Government have given an early indication of their intended advice to the Committees. I earnestly hope that the Select Committees will concentrate their attention on the route of the rail link and the road alignment defined in the Bill.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I am one of those who support the Bill in principle. I am not happy about the Stratford international station, but I am sure that it will not happen. Can the Secretary of State help me on the timetable for petitions? The Bill comprises 197 pages, but I understand that petitions have to be in by 6 February. Is there any possibility of extending the deadline?

Dr. Mawhinney: We had to judge what we thought was sufficient time for petitions to be submitted against the need to make progress with the Bill, which will already span a second parliamentary Session. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the decision was well based even if he would have liked to vary it by a few days one way or the other.

The project has been studied exhaustively. The route has been developed and refined with care and after extensive consultation. Its impact has been assessed in a thorough, professional and independent manner, and the results have been made known. The benefits of the rail link for the whole country are manifest. The moment has come to decide to build the longest new railway in this country for a century. I believe that Parliament will want to seize this opportunity, and accordingly I commend the Bill to the House.

4.12 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Secretary of State has presented the Second Reading of the Bill, here and elsewhere, as though it were a political triumph: the reality has been rather different.

We welcome, of course, the fact that this rail link will more than double the capacity available for international rail services between Britain and Europe. We welcome, of course, the 30-minute cut in the journey time between London and Paris and between London and Brussels—indeed, I think that the cut in journey time to destinations on the east coast main line will be an hour—and we welcome, of course, the fact that journey times for the 25,000 long-suffering commuters who travel from the Medway towns and north-east Kent into London every working day will be reduced significantly. Up to 12 high-speed services an hour in each direction on the new line, a clipping of 40 minutes off the journey time from Dover, a near halving of the journey time from Ashford and a more than halving of the travel time from Gravesend are clearly valuable achievements and we unreservedly welcome them.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: As I mentioned Gravesend, I will give way.

Mr. Arnold: What does the hon. Gentleman think of some of his hon. Friends who have been busily attacking Ebbsfleet and saying that the station should not be built there, in view of the improvements to commuting for Gravesend people that he has rightly mentioned?

Mr. Meacher: We all know the circumstances in which the Ebbsfleet decision was made. It will be the parkway for the M25 and the proposal makes good sense in that respect, but the manner in which political lobbyists were involved in the decision did not help the underlying rationale for Ebbsfleet.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No. I would prefer to make progress.

The most that can be said for this Second Reading debate is that it ends seven years of muddle. The delays and policy reverses have blighted huge swathes of south-east England. The incoherence of the Government's approach to long-term infrastructure projects has been ruthlessly exposed. Selling back property purchased during the property boom will entail a waste of about £140 million of taxpayers' money, which, if it had been better spent, could have completely refurbished any of the main lines that are now crumbling as a result of years of non-investment. Above all, the slippage in the timetable has been deeply embarrassing to our national reputation.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: In view of my long relationship with the right hon. Gentleman over most issues, although not over transport, I am glad to give way to him.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman's generosity, but is it not a bit rich of him to

[Sir Norman Fowler]

go on about delay? Was not he a member of the Labour Government who, in 1975, cancelled the channel tunnel project absolutely?

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman goes back to 1975 and very different economic conditions. The channel tunnel has been under consideration in this country for more than 100 years. To associate that delay with the previous Labour Government is a pretty cheap political point.

The British high-speed link will not be ready until 2002 at the earliest, eight years after the Eurostar trains have been forced to begin their slow trundle from the channel. President Mitterrand's quip at the opening of the TGV line between Paris and Lille—that, although high-speed trains would race across the plains of northern France, their ambling through Kent would enable passengers to savour the British countryside—was not a graceful gesture about the beauties of the English landscape; it was a humiliating put-down of the Government's incompetence.

The French built their high-speed link before the completion of the tunnel and the Belgians will complete theirs over the next three years. Only in Britain shall we have to endure the indignity, let alone the inconvenience, of knowing that, although Eurostar trains race across France at speeds of up to 185 mph and travel through the tunnel at 85 mph, they then trundle their way to London at 50 mph. The delay over the British link, which is a national disgrace, reflects a bumbling and short-sightedness that are extreme even by this Government's standards.

When the go-ahead for the tunnel was given, the Government's initial response was to say that there was no need for the link because there would be plenty of room on existing Kent lines. It took—[HON. MEMBERS: "Quite right."] Hon. Members' reaction confirms my point. It is astonishing that the Government alone did not realise that a dedicated link was necessary. It took them years, because of their short-termist, market outlook, to realise that the link was not merely a minor addendum but was vital to ensure that the capacity of the tunnel would be fully used.

Then, of course, there were the policy zig-zags. Since 1987, when the channel tunnel treaty was signed, there have been at least four major policy reversals: on funding, on alignment, on consortium make-up and on environmental damage.

Overshadowing all that has been the Government's vacillation on finance. If one wants a monument to the Government's arrogance and ideological stupidity, one need look no further than the funding of the high-speed rail link. So rigid, so dogmatic was the Thatcherite edict that private enterprise must build the link that tens of millions of pounds of European money was rejected. Why? Because it required a Government contribution.

The result has been endless shilly-shallying over how many tunnels should be bored, the cost of the new station at Ashford international, the merits of an underground terminal at King's Cross as part of a comprehensive redevelopment, indecisiveness over Stratford and uncertainty over freight routes to the north. To cap it all, we now have the absurd irony of the Government being forced to pay very much more for something that they could have had earlier at a far cheaper price.

Mr. William O'Brien: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall in a moment.

The bad public relations, the confusion of purpose between the Government and British Rail and the constantly changing ideas on what the rail link was designed to achieve have all squandered much taxpayers' money. It is likely that the cost of engineering studies alone will total about £350 million. It is now likely that the Government—perhaps I should say the long-suffering taxpayer—will have to pay half the estimated cost of almost £3 billion.

Dr. Mawhinney *rose—*

Mr. Meacher: I shall give way in a second.

The real lesson of this wretched saga is that, if the Government had not been so stubborn and prejudiced, the link could almost have been built by now, and at much less cost. The tragedy for Britain is that a project with a lifespan of well over a century, generating economic and environmental benefits far beyond its balance sheet, has been saddled with a Government who cannot see beyond their short-term City horizons.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend is describing the malaise during the build-up to this Bill, but will he develop his reference to the link with the northern regions? Without capital investment in the line to the north, especially to Yorkshire, the benefits expounded by the Secretary of State of the speed of freight and passenger transport will not be realised. We must impress on the Government the need to invest in the east coast line if we are to achieve all the possible benefits of the tunnel for northern regions.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend anticipates the next section of my speech. Indeed, not only the east coast main line but the west coast main line deserve considerable upgrading.

Dr. Mawhinney: I introduced the Bill on the basis that it had some all-party support, but the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is now confusing me. A few moments ago he lambasted the Government for insisting on private-sector finance for the project and for being ideologically driven, but he then said that the poor, long-suffering taxpayer would have to pay half. If I understand his first point, he wants the long-suffering taxpayer to pay for all of it. Does the hon. Gentleman have the permission of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to say that the Labour party would prefer the line to be funded entirely by the public sector?

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman has a nerve to make that point. Under the so-called "Prescott option", the Labour party has repeatedly made a proposal that, for ideological reasons and for no other, the Government have repeatedly not been prepared to accept.

We have always taken the view that private sector money should be involved but that the public sector must play a leading role in such a major infrastructure project. The Government and the Secretary of State have failed to accept that, which has caused the delays and vacillation.

Mr. Haselhurst: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I want to make progress. I am conscious of the recommendation made in the Jopling report that Front-Bench spokesmen should not take up so much time and that many hon. Members wish to participate in the debate.

That tunnel vision—if I may use the phrase with some conscious irony—is still handicapping the project. That brings me to the very important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien). Concern still exists that the tunnel will increase the north-south divide unless much greater commitment than has so far been announced is made to major new rail investment to link the north-west and the north-east to the south-east.

Britain still needs a strategy, which Labour has long advocated, to develop high-speed rail links through the heart of Britain to the north of England and to Scotland, to improve existing cross-country links to connect the east and west of England and Wales to the higher-speed network and to fill in more of the gaps in the electrified lines, in particular on the east midlands main line and the trans-Pennine route.

In particular, as Conservative Members pointed out earlier, we still a need a much more ambitious approach to the tunnel's potential role in shifting long-distance freight from road to rail. For too long, the Government have refused to accept European proposals for road and rail transfers, such as intermodal wagons or piggy-back systems, because of their prejudice against public investment in the railways.

We still need to develop more freight interchanges and multimodal road-to-rail freight depots to relieve congestion and, above all, to upgrade key freight routes to the European freight gauge standards to ensure full compatibility of rolling stock between the regions and the continent.

There must be upgrading to the right loading-gauge to take containers, swap bodies and semi-trailers. Although the Secretary of State did not refer to this point, the United Kingdom loading gauge height must be increased by about 170 mm to create the piggy-back gauge.

The Government's present attitude to freight and the rail link is far too laid back. Instead of capitalising on the link's full market potential, they concentrate almost exclusively on passenger targets and fast-delivery parcel services. They believe that, if freight demand justifies it, additional tracks known as passing loops could be provided at two places in Kent to allow passenger trains to overtake slower freight trains. However, that, like so much else, is left to the decision of the nominated undertaker.

That is the same narrowness of vision and short-termist outlook that postponed the rail link for years in the 1980s and forced the Government to pay more later for what they could have had earlier much more cheaply. It is a tragedy for transport policy in this country that the Government have no positive policy on international freight aimed at relieving our over-congested roads of a significant proportion of heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Haselhurst: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I wish to make a point about Kent, after which I shall give way.

In Kent, for example, the gauge of the Victorian Saltwood tunnel restricts larger international freight, but so great is the Government's obsession with privatisation that they prefer a fractured system under which advances will be made at the whim of individual contractors. It has been estimated that upgrading the route corridor from Ireland to Scotland to the continent via the channel tunnel has potential for 400,000 lorry semi-trailers a year, but that will not be realised, or it will certainly not be fully realised, because the west coast main line, which, under Euro-funding, will be piggy-back, and another European scheme, the Cork to Belfast to Stranraer route, which under Euro-funding will also be piggy-back, are not linked.

We have the nonsense of trucks having to revert to roads through Scotland. What is so badly lacking in the Bill is the vision to maximise the tunnel's potential to achieve a major shift in international freight from road to rail at little relative extra cost.

Mr. Haselhurst: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: Indeed, it has been estimated that providing the necessary headroom between Glasgow and the channel tunnel would cost less than £70 million—out of a project costing nearly £3 billion. That would create an 800-km intermodal rail route and at half the cost of widening 12 km of the M25 between junctions 12 and 15. Strategic vision is lacking in the Bill, which is a major weakness.

Mr. Haselhurst: Has the hon. Gentleman costed that strategic vision? He has proposed several projects to enhance the rail system, but has he costed them? Is he committing Labour to that expenditure?

Mr. Meacher: I have just given the extra cost. The hon. Gentleman was desperately keen to intervene, and he was probably not listening to what I was saying. The proposal has been costed at an extra £70 million. *[Interruption.]* I think that it has been costed by UK Transmodal, a private sector consortium that supports the piggy-back gauge, which should have all-party support. It is a relatively minor proportion of the total cost of the project. Gains to the country in the medium term are much greater. The balance-sheet mentality that looks cross-sectionally at costs today without regard to the value to the country in the medium or longer term is precisely what is wrong with the Government's approach to the Bill.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend. Does he agree that, far from raising red herrings about cost, Conservative Members should apologise for the 10-year delay in processing the project and for the fact that, at a cost of millions of pounds of public funds, the Government acquired properties along other routes that have since been scrapped? If any party is guilty of wasting money on the project, it is the Conservative party.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to a point that I made earlier about the

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cost of properties bought during the property boom until 1988-89 that must now be sold back because of the change from the southern to the eastern route. That cost is about £140 million. Conservative Members' comments about a major change that would enormously benefit international freight yet would cost half that amount show their narrow-mindedness.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No. I wish to make progress. I want to make two or three more points before I finish.

That is not the only missed opportunity in the Bill. Another vital decision that the Government are evading—I know that the Secretary of State says that he is holding it open, but he is evading it; he could have gone much further and, again, is leaving the matter to the nominated undertaker—is the future of Stratford. On 14 October 1991, the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor said:

"It is envisaged that the high-speed train from the channel tunnel to King's Cross will stop at Stratford".—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 34.]

The then Secretary of State for the Environment—the present President of the Board of Trade—said that the development at Stratford

"has implications far beyond its crucial transport significance . . . It provides east of London with a development opportunity of unique potential . . . We cannot approach an opportunity of this magnitude field by field, site by site."

I very much echo his sentiments, but unfortunately the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues have not adhered to them.

Moreover, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has described Stratford and the royals as the western focus of the Thames gateway, complementing the Dartford-Ebbsfleet station as the eastern focus. Union Railways, in its March 1993 report, specified that one of its three key objectives was

"to provide the transport spine for the East Thames corridor development, shifting the pressure from the west to the east of London."

I emphasise the second part of that statement.

There is no commitment to Stratford in the Bill. Without a station at Stratford, there will not be sufficient regeneration based on the rail link in east London. We believe that the case for an international passenger station at Stratford is powerful. It would permit much faster journeys to the continent from east London, East Anglia and Essex. It would take about half an hour less than going to St. Pancras. It would offer a faster dispersal point from St. Pancras for many key destinations in central London—such as the City—thus avoiding the heavy cost of expanding underground capacity at St. Pancras.

An intermediate station at Stratford would be ideally located to complement the existing and planned interchange at Stratford, which includes Network SouthEast, the Northern line, the Central line, the docklands light railway, the Jubilee line and crossrail—if it goes ahead—as well as the tunnel link.

In addition, the regeneration potential is equally telling. There are more than 200 acres—I visited the area last week—of under-used brown field land at Stratford. An international station would open the way for large-scale, mixed-use development including business parks, industry, offices, hotels, leisure and retail uses. For all those, the international station is not merely an additional regenerative factor but the cusp of the whole enterprise. It would provide the potential for 15,000 more jobs in an area where there are 120,000 people unemployed within a five-mile radius.

Stratford already has immediate access to the national motorway system via the M11. As I have stated, there are significant potential land resources close to central London, but only the international station will confirm Stratford's role as an international gateway, regional transport hub and regional service centre and thus generate the demand for the critical mass of development that is so vital for the east Thames corridor. The Government have ducked those matters today despite their earlier commitments, and we shall want to see them fully examined by the Select Committee.

I turn briefly to the instruction to the Committee, which we have tabled. In a number of instances, the benefit of tunnelling at a relatively low cost as against the proposed surface works has not been fully taken into account. In the Caledonian road area—one of two remaining disputed parts of the line in London—the combination of cut and cover, sewer tunnelling, the major construction site and huge heavy goods vehicle movements has never been tested by consultation. The Bill's proposals result in an aerial spaghetti junction across King's Cross railway lands, and substantially reduce the development value.

The Secretary of State will know that Islington's consultants, Baxters, have recommended alternative tunnelling options that avoid the interference of a cut-and-cover trench, remove the need to retunnel the Fleet sewer and do not involve a major works site across Caledonian road.

I am always asked about cost, so let me make it clear again that the cost will be an extra £40 million. However, by freeing up the north-west corner of the King's Cross railway lands for development, the option is expected to produce an extra development value of some £80 million.

Union Railways has admitted that one option would be better than the proposal in the Bill, but I am told that the Department has refused to put it in the Bill. I understand that Union Railways has so far refused to disclose the results of its work on the other option. For those reasons, we want the matter to be thoroughly examined in Committee.

We also want the tunnelling option at Barking and Dagenham to be further investigated. Under the present plans, high-speed trains will travel at 140 mph within some 20 ft, at the narrowest point, of the back of a line of houses in a heavily built-up residential area. That is intolerable. No hon. Member would be prepared to put up with that. Alternative tunnelling options have been suggested for either a route under Barking reach or an extension of tunnelling to the east boundary of the borough underneath the existing rail corridor.

The extended tunnel will, of course, be more expensive, but the cost will be substantially offset by large reductions in enabling works, the virtual removal of railway safety and possession costs, the reduced cost of allowing work during normal daytime hours and easement in railway restrictions. That is why we want those options or any others to be fully re-examined.

In mid-Kent, where the line switches—

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that specific point?

Mr. Meacher: I mentioned mid-Kent, so I will give way.

Mr. Arnold: For the hon. Gentleman's information, I represent a constituency in north-west Kent. He has given a shopping list of tunnelling cases. Why does his amendment specifically omit Ashenbank wood at Cobham, where vast environmental destruction will result if a tunnel is not constructed? Why has he omitted the case for a tunnel opposite Pepper Hill and the urban part of Northfleet, which would be damaged if a tunnel was not constructed?

Mr. Meacher: I do not exclude the desirability of the Select Committee examining the case for other tunnels. The hon. Gentleman makes the mistake of assuming that we are concerned about only the tunnels that we have specifically mentioned. It is no attempt at an exhaustive list. I am ready to support the view that tunnelling options in other places should be examined by the Committee.

In mid-Kent, where the line switches—this is a significant point—between the transport corridors of the M20 and the A2-M2 and carves through the north downs, Union Railways has opted for the shortest possible length of tunnel. We want the case for a longer tunnel to be re-examined, because the area is officially designated as one of outstanding natural beauty and because to join the Medway towns and Maidstone with surface development through the present green corridor would produce a sprawling conurbation as large as a major city.

The Bill still contains some serious deficiencies on the environment and on compensation generally. As I will undoubtedly be interrupted again, I make it clear that the deficiencies to which I shall refer are not the only ones but those to which I briefly want to draw attention.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I was tempted not to interrupt my hon. Friend, but he has not mentioned the Thurrock section. His instruction expresses the desire for at least some examination of tunnelling at Thurrock. May I invite him to consider that the plans for the section are as bad as those for Barking and Dagenham, which he referred to as unacceptable? In addition, the plans include viaducts as high as the highest point of the Galleries around the Chamber. The decision to build those viaducts was affected by the decision to locate the international station at Ebbsfleet. That altered the Rifkind line of route to the MacGregor one. Blue Circle should make a contribution to the cost of tunnelling that section because its benefit is Thurrock's loss.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes his case for his constituency forcefully. The Secretary of State dismissed the point that my hon. Friend made by saying that it was difficult to conceal a viaduct as anything other than a viaduct. I suppose that it was an attempt at a joke, but it was an inadequate response. Viaducts are an eyesore.

My hon. Friend asks about compensation. The proper answer to his question is that tunnelling should be re-examined. That is why we have included Thurrock in the specific list of the areas where we believe the tunnelling option needs to be reviewed.

I am conscious of the time so I shall make just three more quick points. As the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said, the Bill allows construction teams to build the track up to 3 m above the line decided by Parliament. That is not acceptable. In some areas such a vertical deviation would alter the whole nature of the line.

Noise protection levels are premised on speeds of some 140 mph, when higher speeds of 180 mph if not 250 mph are already planned. The current proposal is that only people whose property is physically affected by the rail link will be bought out. Others who are intolerably affected by noise or construction will have to wait years for compensation. That is not acceptable.

It is a tragedy that such a huge national flagship project, so necessary for the industrial and economic regeneration of Britain, has been marred by short-sightedness, ideological stupidity and lack of strategic perspective. There could scarcely be a more dramatic example of why Britain needs a Government who believe in a positive role for the public sector, who are motivated by strategic vision and who have an overriding commitment to the regeneration of Britain. That will be our approach when we take over the project.

4.46 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). It is several years since we have spoken in the same debate one after the other. I am not sure that his script has improved much in that time. I hear what he says about the urgency of the project and the need to make progress. I agree; we need to make progress. However, I wonder at the credentials of the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party in making the charge of delay. After all, the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who normally sits here beside me, started the channel tunnel. The Labour Government in January 1975 cancelled the tunnel. At that stage, the hon. Member for Oldham, West was a Minister at the Department of Industry.

With that cancellation, the tunnel went, the link went, the whole shooting match went. The Labour Government cut public spending. They cut spending on capital projects. So I suggest that whoever can lecture the Conservative Government on delay in building the tunnel or the link, it certainly is not the hon. Member for Oldham, West or the Labour party. Indeed, I should go much further than that. Railways are now back in the news. The Labour party has just committed itself to a publicly owned, publicly managed railway system. *[Interruption.]* I am grateful for confirmation of that.

It is important to make the following point about this system. The channel tunnel, which is crucial to the future of the railways, was built not by public money but by private investment. The reason why it is open today is that private investors were prepared to take the risk. It was not a case of the taxpayers being forced to accept that risk. That principle of private investment now underlines the rail link as well. We should not overlook the successful and substantial revolution that the channel tunnel represents.

Back in 1979, when I was Minister of Transport, it was a different age. In those days, there were only two Ministers in the Department of Transport—myself and my

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right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). There were certainly only two shadow spokesmen.

One of the problems that I inherited from the outgoing Labour Government was the channel tunnel. After almost six years of power, the Labour party had got precisely nowhere. We were no further forward on how to finance it or on how to build it. We had plenty of studies and statements, but absolutely no action.

I concede that, when the Conservatives came to power, under my right hon. and noble Friend Lady Thatcher, it was evident to even the dimmest commentator that the project would not proceed if we simply relied on the taxpayer's resources. Yet it seemed to me that the advantages of channel link remained obvious. The potential for car passengers, for freight movement and obviously for railway passengers was evident.

It was not because there was a need for an integrated transport system, or however it has been put by the Opposition; it was because such a link provided a means of transport that the public themselves wanted. There was a commercial opportunity and therefore, rather than talking about public money, as we had done at the time of the last Labour Government and before that, we realised that there was an opportunity for private capital. So, in March 1980, I was able to tell the House that the tunnel could go ahead if, and only if, it was funded by private risk capital.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who says that the Labour party has always been in favour of these sorts of things, that I do not remember the Labour party rushing to support that new step. Its opinion was that, if it was a public project, only public money should be used to finance it. Indeed, there were echoes of that in the speech by the hon. Gentleman this afternoon. He is being held back, but we all know that, left to his own devices, the hon. Member for Oldham, West would prefer to go that way. That was the conventional transport wisdom of the time, and it certainly was the opinion of the Labour party.

Albert Booth, who was then the shadow Secretary of State for Transport, said at the time:

"If it is of considerable public advantage, why make that development dependent upon it facilitating private profit?"—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1980; Vol. 981, c. 390.]

That was not exactly an endorsement of private investment. It was, if I may so describe it, the clause IV of investment that investment of that type must be public investment.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way and for his exposition of the background to financing the tunnel privately. Does he agree that, if the huge cost overruns that developed in the building of the tunnel had been on the taxpayer's back, they would have been an appalling burden for the taxpayer to carry, but that the overruns have been privately financed?

Sir Norman Fowler: I agree with my hon. Friend. The key is that private risk capital was used. That is what we sought, and that is what we achieved.

Let me add that, even with the private investment plan, there were substantial problems. Above all, the Treasury—I suspect that I might take the hon. Member for Oldham, West with me on this—remained sceptical. I am amused to see that it now claims to be the pioneer of private investment. In truth, I think that it was a very late convert to the cause.

The real breakthrough, as far as the tunnel was concerned, came—the hon. Member for Oldham, West alluded to it—when President Mitterrand and a number of socialist Ministers came to visit Lady Thatcher together in 1981. In spite of all the predictions, it was a very good meeting. I imagine that it was rather like a meeting between the hon. Member for Oldham, West and the Leader of the Opposition. It was courteous; it was friendly; but there was no real meeting of minds.

However, in the case of a meeting of national leaders, a communiqué must be issued afterwards. Something had to be said—they had to agree on something. I am glad to say that, with some prompting, they agreed on the need for a channel tunnel. In Whitehall, the order went out that the Prime Minister wanted it and, as the hon. Gentleman will know, with his Government experience, the No. 10 Downing street card trumps all in Whitehall.

So it happened that the channel tunnel was built. It was built by private investment. The tunnel also promises to be a great success, and that success has been achieved by Conservative Governments and certainly would not have been achieved under a Labour Government. That is quite obvious.

I for one want similar determination and urgency to be employed to complete the channel tunnel rail link. I have always doubted whether the present rail system would be able to deal with rail demands until 2005. All the early signs suggest that the passenger services to Paris and Brussels will be successful. All the signs are that many people will gladly switch from the crush of Heathrow to the railway. Many people will take the view that it is the best and quickest way to travel.

As has been mentioned, there is substantial potential for freight as well. As the House knows, I am a non-executive director of NFC plc. It is not an investor in the terminal, in the tunnel or the link, but doubtless it will be a user—a customer—at some stage. However, let me return to the subject of passengers.

It would be a great pity if the full potential of the railways were defeated by capacity problems; if, having achieved the major goal of the tunnel, we were tripped by the question of the link running to it. I therefore wish to question Ministers on two aspects.

The first aspect is the arrangement for financing the link. It was sensible for the Government to ask for private investment. Obviously, a good business opportunity exists; but equally, in the case of the link, I am aware of no reason why public money should be excluded, and I say that for the following reason.

The link is not as outstanding a commercial opportunity as the tunnel, which has the income stream provided by the car and the lorry shuttle. Even more significantly, there can be no doubt that the link must meet important environmental demands to protect the public—involving tunnelling and so on. Thus, the link must meet other criteria in addition to exclusively business criteria. In those circumstances, it is entirely justifiable that public investment be used, and the fact that the costs may be perhaps one-third of the project emphasises the argument.

I think that the Government are right to say that the link will be a private and public project. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport was not urged to reply on the subject, but perhaps he might have been—not to say how much, which I assume will be part of the negotiations, nor on the percentage or the capital sum concerned.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend has been especially modest in describing his contribution to the development of the channel tunnel, and I should like to record that, at least on behalf of Conservative Members. As for his specific argument, of course he is right to note that the link will be a public-private arrangement. The public sector, through actions that I shall take, will contribute Union Railways' and European Passenger Services' cash and property to the arrangement.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am grateful.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I note his argument, but does he agree that the fact that—as far as I know—bids must be submitted before the full alignment and requirements of the Hybrid Bill Committees in both Houses are known, makes the costs of construction and running the railway slightly hypothetical; not to mention the fact that the market price of tariffs of alternative routes by air, sea and land makes the projection of any profit difficult? Does he agree that that perhaps makes the theology of always applying private criteria to that specific project questionable?

Sir Norman Fowler: I thank my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for what he said. I hear what the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) says. If we can manage to build the channel tunnel entirely with private money, it should not be beyond our capacity to carry out a joint rail link project.

I confess to being a little puzzled about how it has been announced that public investment is to be committed. Section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 says:

"No government grants to the Railway Board in respect of international railway services"

are allowed. I imagine that the legal advice is that that ban does not include other facilities like commuter services running on the new rail link, or bodies other than the Railway Board. I imagine that, as always, the Treasury opposes any change in the 1987 Act which it fears might open the floodgates. Having made every allowance, however, there is something to be said for clarity in legislation, particularly when public funds are at stake.

Dr. Mawhinney: May I help my hon. Friend again? Section 42 to which he refers applies to a public sector body, which is British Rail. The rail link will be a private sector entity, and the circumstances are entirely different. We do not plan to repeal section 42.

Sir Norman Fowler: That just confirms what I was saying. I understood that point. We shall see the position as it develops.

My second question concerns access to the rail link from other parts of the country. In that respect, I agree strongly with what the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) said. I shall leave it to my right hon. and hon. Friends behind me to raise issues relating to the south of the country. My concern is about the midlands and the north.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): And the north-west.

Sir Norman Fowler: Of course. The north includes the north-west and the north-east.

According to the Union Railways brief, and as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed, once the rail link has been completed it will take two and a half hours to travel from St. Pancras to Paris. That makes it a very attractive service which the public will clearly support. From Birmingham to Paris, however, it will take four and a half hours and from Manchester to Paris, five and a quarter hours, even after the rail link has been completed. The Union Railways' brief states that those are

"Electrified Main Lines, which could be served by direct international day-time trains, via junctions at St. Pancras. Some routes would need engineering work or station works. Easy interchange with international trains at St. Pancras are also available to these routes".

When the Minister sums up, will he say a little more about the position? Will he explain how the nation north-east and north-west of St. Pancras will join up with the rail link, what engineering and station works are required and, above all, what timing is planned?

Mr. William O'Brien: I appreciate the support that has been given to the points that I made earlier when I intervened on the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will impress on the Secretary of State the need for capital investment, be it private or public, in the lines from St. Pancras to the north if we are to have the speed and efficiency required, to which people in the north are entitled.

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes, indeed. That takes me to my final point.

Clearly, the whole approach to the channel tunnel and channel link is that we must seek to attract the public on to the railways. To do that, the east coast and west coast routes urgently require investment. Given the private investment that is planned, the west coast route is even more urgent than the east coast one. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can say something about that when he responds.

Clearly, we shall hear much more from the hon. Member for Oldham, West about the so-called "integrated transport policy", public ownership and the advantages of public management. I am bound to say that, from my experience, to hold up British Rail as an example of how an industry should be managed is one of the most extraordinary claims that I have ever heard. How can it help the running of the railways to have Ministers and civil servants breathing down the necks of British Rail managers? Whatever Opposition Members may think, that is the reality of nationalised industries, and it happened more under Labour than under this Government. Bureaucracy and interference go together.

The real debate should be about how we attract the public onto the railways. In achieving that, the Government have taken a number of crucial steps, which Labour simply has not done. They have enabled the building of the channel tunnel with private investment, and the tunnel is now open. Had we relied on public

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spending, it would not be open. The Government are now enabling the rail link to proceed. Again, private investment is crucial to that project, although some public money will be required to meet some of its legitimate objectives.

Both projects will go down as substantial achievements—the achievements of private investment. We now need the greatest possible speed in completing the rail link so that the railways can compete for business effectively.

5:6 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Clearly, there is general support for the principle of the Bill. What is criticised is not only the late arrival of this Eurostar or Euro union but some of the features surrounding it. I raised one of those in an intervention in the speech of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). If we are to protect the public, particularly people on the route—some defects in the Bill will be raised in Committee in that respect—we must be prepared as members of the public to support the operation of that line. The Government, however, say that they want it to be constructed and run by the same firm. The paradox in that respect is, in modern circumstances, difficult to sustain.

Criticism has also been made about the railway track. A two-track railway can operate to a certain capacity and at certain speeds and braking distances, but if it is to retain freight in order to relieve noise and disturbance elsewhere while also operating as a domestic line, a two-track railway may not be enough. The Bill would have been better had it contained the reservation for a three-track extension or widening as and when the time arose, or even for a four-track line in future centuries. That requires a public less than a private enterprise.

My speech will focus on my instruction on the Order Paper. I understand why all instructions cannot be accepted for debate, but I shall read it to transfer it from the Order Paper to *Hansard*. It stands in my name and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, North-West (Mr.Banks) and for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), and the hon. Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Castle Point (Dr. Spink). Other hon. Members may support it in their speeches. It instructs the Select Committee:

"that it shall consider the merits of including in the Bill all powers, facilities, permissions, licences and other statutory provisions required for the construction and operation of a combined international and domestic passenger station at Stratford, in the London Borough of Newham, comparable to those in the Bill applying to such a station at Ebbsfleet in Kent."

When I intervened on the Secretary of State, he agreed that, while there are powers in the Bill for Ebbsfleet, there are none for Stratford, but thought that that was not inequity. I would claim that it is inequity for a true option, which is the Government's well-rehearsed and well-publicised policy.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I just want to confirm what the hon. Gentleman said—that there are other Conservative Members who would support such an instruction. I hope very much that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of that fact and of the fact that this relatively harmless instruction keeps options open—options which might be valuable for the future.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful for the support of the hon. Gentleman. I have noted other interventions from hon. Members who represent constituencies throughout East Anglia, because it is the north-eastern part of London, particularly into East Anglia, that requires cross-Thames access to the channel tunnel. I understand, subject to correction, that the figures that Union Railways presented to various people on the likely use of the tunnel were based on assumptions relating to air traffic from Heathrow. I suggest that that is not necessarily a good way of going about it.

I also take the point made by the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), because if we do not get it right now, the option diversion will surely get worse. If the Bill does not provide optional powers for a possible station at Stratford, people will say, "We are not sure; the future is not clear." Will there be an additional order under the Transport and Works Act 1992? That will be difficult. It will take time, and perhaps another Bill. There may be more objections and procedure, which I suggest will further the difference in terms of the option that the Government claim is there but which, I suggest, in reality is not in terms of prospects and what is in the Bill.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The option for a station at Stratford is kept open by the Bill. The hon. Gentleman will recall the very informative debate that we had on that matter in the early hours of the morning just before Christmas. The Government decided that Ebbsfleet should be part of the project and that there should be a parkway there, while the decision on Stratford remains open.

The decision will be taken not by the nominated undertaker of the project, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, but by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It will be informed by the bids that we receive, which will evaluate the economic arguments made so cogently by supporters of the Stratford case on many occasions. The position for a station at Stratford, should the case be made, is protected in the Bill. It is only for the building works connected with the station that Transport and Works Act procedures would be required. If the promoting company felt that there was justification for it—that would inform my right hon. Friend's decision—I do not believe that obtaining the necessary powers through those procedures will be an obstacle to the construction of the station.

Mr. Spearing: I think that, on reflection, the Minister will agree that his intervention is helpful to our case. I do not think that the option is in the Bill. Let me specify. On page 96 of schedule 4, where it shows the land numbers on deposited plans, on parcels 26 to 32 relating to Ebbsfleet it says:

"The provision of an international and domestic passenger station with ancillary development and car parking, diversion of overhead electric cables".

On the relevant parcels of land on page 89 of the same schedule, relating to Stratford, no such words appear; it is largely related to construction purposes, electric cables and so on. If the Minister is telling me that full powers for a station are in the Bill, that is not the information or advice that I have been given.

He agrees that he is not telling me that, so if the option is to be made by the Secretary of State—I am grateful for the confirmation of that—after the bids are in, why does he not give himself that option in the Bill rather than saying, "If I choose to accept the choice for Stratford I must go to the House either with a Transport and Works Act order or with a Bill"? Perhaps the Minister will answer that.

Mr. Watts: The Bill makes provision for the long box, which would hold the structure of the station. It does not make provision for a station, because no decision has yet been made on whether there should be a station. The Bill is constructed in such a way that that option is not closed off. If a decision were made that a station should be constructed at Stratford it could be done by a Transport and Works Act procedure, or it might even be possible at a later stage to consider an amendment to the Bill. I do not believe that anything in the structure of the Bill closes off that option, should my right hon. Friend be persuaded that such a station ought to be built.

Mr. Spearing: I shall not pursue this any further. The difference between us seems to be getting a little narrower, but the mere fact that other actions need to be taken, including an amendment, or perhaps an additional provision, which is also possible, makes the case.

I do not wish to take too long, as many hon. Members wish to speak, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), who has had more to do with the matter, and properties in his constituency are very much affected. The adoption of the Stratford option would have advantages for regeneration, in environmental terms, in public transport and finance, all of which are matters to which the Government and, I am sure, all hon. Members would give their assent.

The Government said that east London would benefit from regeneration. My hon. Friend, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is better qualified than I to speak, as a former leader of Newham council. All I would add is that, if there are to be domestic services from Kent, as has been indicated, the effects of regeneration on east London will be great, but they will be less so if domestic United Kingdom services cannot stop at Stratford, still less go on through the projected cross-rail, possibly to Heathrow. Good strategic planning suggests that that is where they should go.

The Government now say that they want a balance between road and rail traffic. If there is to be freedom from the car, an argument which may appeal to the noble Baroness Thatcher, we must use rail properly and to the best advantage. Yet in the Bill there is a possibility for an M25 interchange, to which people from the London area or even further north might wish to head in their cars on a long-distance journey, whereas if they use the existing rail network in London to get to St. Pancras or Stratford, the frequency and distance of travel by car might not be so great, because the interchange possibility at Stratford is very considerable. True, it is possible at King's Cross, too, but King's Cross is an inner-London area, constrained by Victorian architecture and existing functions, whereas a Stratford station would have many advantages.

At present, there are no fewer than 14 rail routes clockwise, as it were—the Central line has two branches in one direction—which can, with one connection to Chingford, be reinstated, centering on Stratford. With cross-rail, there would be even more. That would give direct access to Stratford from 180 stations in Greater London and south-east England, and from more than 200 if the cross-rail were built. Those stations include major stations in East Anglia, but not the rest.

There would also be direct access to Stratford, in addition to the through trains from the rest of the United Kingdom, by the use of the north London rail link and others, particularly from Manchester, Birmingham or Newcastle, by fast or semi-fast trains. Those routes could include centres for through registration of luggage and ticketing, with certain through trains perhaps providing a timetable interchange.

We all have difficulties sometimes when a terminus is experiencing problems; Stratford station could serve as an extra means of shortening journeys when there are difficulties in the centre, as Clapham Junction, Finsbury Park and Reading do now when such inevitable difficulties occur. Stratford would also provide direct communication with the royal docks area, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) pointed out. That area already has an international airport, and will almost certainly have a university college and a large exhibition centre: together, the two will have a second-phase floor space equivalent to Olympia and Earl's Court.

There would also be an additional financial return. People might wish to use Stratford on the domestic route, or might take the fast channel link because of the existence of that station. There could be charter traffic or long-distance sleepers to anywhere in Europe, avoiding rail and personnel congestion at St. Pancras. I think that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield agrees with me that that would provide extra revenue for the line.

The House has been discussing this problem for more than a century. Sir Edward Watkin, a railway pioneer of over a century ago, put together the former Lincolnshire and Yorkshire railways to form the Great Central, of which I believe he was chairman. That was the last great main line to London, and at least the route should have been kept, because it was built to a continental gauge. Sir Edward was also chairman of the Metropolitan railway, of which the East London line was a subsidiary, and of the South Eastern and Chatham and the then Channel Tunnel company. He had a bit of co-ordination.

I do not think that we have quite reached the standards of Sir Edward Watkin a century ago. The Bill goes towards that, but it would be a better Bill if it were enlarged to allow powers for Stratford to be built, at the option of the Secretary of State.

5.21 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in the debate. I have listened with interest so far: it is fascinating to note that everyone now accepts the need for the line, although British Rail told the Select Committee considering the tunnel that there was no foreseeable need for any such railway.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) spoke of what happened over a century ago. Over a century ago, a protester in Kent said that there should be no tunnelling there—especially in the Boxley valley—because of the danger of unexpectedly running into a manure cart coming in the other direction. Attitudes to the tunnel have changed remarkably since then, however. The

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

Boxley long tunnel, for instance, is essential if Kent is to retain a conurbation of the proper size; without it, development in Maidstone and the Medway towns will close up on the surface railway just as it has done on the motorways that surround the valley.

There are plenty of environmental reasons for recommending a Boxley valley tunnel. I shall not, however, spend time describing the ancient woodland there; I shall not even speak of the protection of a Cistercian abbey which was arguably the parent of the Church of England, as it was there that Henry VIII rejected the Pope's emissaries. Nor shall I stress the fact that the valley is an area of outstanding natural beauty, which would be destroyed by a railway running down the middle of it. The important point—which has been part of the county's central planning for 50 years—is that the great conurbation of the Medway towns should not run into the conurbation of Maidstone, creating an urban sprawl out of all proportion to the rest of the county.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for visiting the area last Thursday to observe the strength of the arguments for himself. I was disappointed when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State appeared to suggest that he would advise the Select Committee not to consider the Boxley tunnel, or any other tunnel outside the limits of deviation. The Boxley tunnel, however, is unique: unlike any of the other tunnelling options considered in the instruction, it does not transfer blight from one part to another. No blight is associated with the tunnel. In a parliamentary answer, the Government stated:

"The long tunnel through the Boxley valley has significant environmental advantages, but the Government decided that these did not justify spending an additional £65 million".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1994; Vol. 236, c. *505*.]

The Department of Transport has also told me that some 160 out of 194 representations received from Kent stressed the importance of a tunnel through the Boxley valley. That view is supported by the county council, every district council, every parish council, every amenity group and every action group. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can assure me that he does not intend to put pressure on the Select Committee to refuse to consider a highly valued and unanimously supported proposal.

Mr. Watts: I remind my hon. Friend that our right hon. Friend said:

"It is for the Select Committees to decide on the scope of their consideration; the Government can only offer guidance in such matters."

There is a clear difference between guidance and an instruction. I am opposed to accepting an instruction to the Committee precisely because it would restrict the Committee's discretion. I am confident that right hon. and hon. Members who are appointed to the Committee will be able to view petitions that are presented to them objectively, and to reach sensible conclusions.

I can give my hon. Friend a further assurance, which I have given at meetings on a number of occasions. The Government will of course continue to support the line of the channel tunnel rail link that is set out in the Bill, because we consider it to be the best route, balancing the various factors that need to be balanced. I shall not, however, indulge in any private arm-twisting to try to make Select Committee members take a particular view.

Any guidance that is given will be given openly, before the Select Committee; there will be no behind-the-scenes shenanigans—not least because, as my hon. Friend will recognise, those appointed to the Committee understand the importance of their task. That task is to examine matters objectively, without being susceptible to undue pressure. In any event, neither the Government nor I myself will exert such pressure.

Mr. Rowe: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful clarification. I am confident that the arguments that I have already advanced, which have been advanced so often and will be advanced again in petitions, will sway the Select Committee.

I have one further argument. The costings suggest that a single-bore tunnel would cost an additional £65 million and that, if the Health and Safety Executive insisted on a twin-bore tunnel, it would add a further £50 million. Those costings are open to serious question. More importantly, the widening of the M20, which is already many months overdue and on which work is continuing, has been delayed and enormous additional costs have been incurred partly because of the extraordinary difficulty of working in slippery gault clay. A large part of the surface route will be constructed on gault clay, but the tunnel itself will pass through entirely predictable chalk and I suspect that there will be a much lower cost differential than is at present claimed.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Will the newly widened M20 be in a tunnel? If it will not, will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the people of Kent object only to noise from trains rather than that from cars and lorries?

Mr. Rowe: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have realised that the thrust of my argument is that, as surface-built motorways have been used as the boundaries of urban sprawl, a surface-built railway will be used in the same way. We are anxious to ensure that that urban sprawl is held as it has been held for the past 50 years by borough councils on both sides of Bluebell hill.

I shall now deal with stations. It is an extraordinary phenomenon that the people who design railways appear to want to make sure that they do not stop anywhere. It was perfectly clear from the beginning that British Rail and its successor Union Railways wanted to build an aeroplane on wheels and had no desire whatever to have stations on their fast line. They have been browbeaten into creating a number of stations which they now gracefully say could conceivably be useful because they might attract some customers.

Ashford now has an international station, thanks substantially to the hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed). It would be wrong for me to trespass in other constituencies, but, as the Select Committee will take this debate as one of its guidelines, it is helpful to have some iteration.

It is important to make it clear that the design of Ashford international station is for only the first generation of trains. If the second generation cannot stop there, the Department of Transport says that any necessary adjustments may be made to the track and line side structures if there is a need for access to the international passenger service by larger trains. It is not a promising start for an international station which could be one of the

great growth points for Kent's economy if, after 25 years, it can be visited only by old-fashioned trains that are approaching the end of their lives.

I am in favour of a station at Stratford, not least because it widens choice for Kent commuters, many of whom have no desire whatever to be taken as far as St. Pancras. I welcome the arrival of the private sector in the project. British Rail has always seemed to prefer to see the difficulties in any changing market situation rather than the opportunities. For example, the way in which it has run down its freight operations in recent years is a disgrace. I look forward to a change in philosophy. I hope that, as part of the private sector desire to get more passengers on to the railways, there will be an attempt to incorporate some junction with the Medway link to help Maidstone residents benefit from the new railway.

Compensation is of great importance. It is bad enough at the moment, but what will it be like in five years? A substantial number of elderly constituents have been confidently expecting that some time in the next decade they will be able to sell their properties and move to their relatives or elsewhere. But their whole future is now deeply in doubt. The current discretionary compensation scheme is wholly inadequate and it was made worse by the profligate purchasing by British Rail of properties at the height of the boom, many of which are not even on the finally decided route. There must be a much more generous and compassionate compensation scheme for the 10-year period of the construction of the line.

It is bizarre that the line has been designed for trains travelling at 140 mph and that environmental protection has been put in by the environmental consultants at that level. Everyone knows, and the designer now admits, that the private sector owner will unquestionably want to run trains at 186 mph, which is the theoretical maximum speed that the line could support. We have been told that the studies that are needed to ascertain the noise effects at that speed have been completed and published. However, a letter last week from Union Railways made it clear that the effects of the mitigation of higher speeds have not yet been worked out.

Clearly, it would be absurd to build the line to lower speed standards if those standards have to be raised later, probably almost as soon as the line is built. In my village of Harrietsham, to take but one example, it would be ridiculous to have a massive sound barrier that had to be raised before the trains had even started to run because the line was designed originally for a lower speed.

Many of my constituents are anxious about the Medway bridge. It is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), but it is of such importance to so many of my constituents that we should consider again whether there should be a two-tier bridge carrying rail and road traffic. We have been told that such bridges do not work, but one has only to look at the example of Newcastle upon Tyne to see that they work quite satisfactorily. Such a bridge would be helpful.

There has been considerable confusion over freight. One day we are told that there will be so many passengers on the new line that there will be no room for freight. The next day we are told that there is so much additional capacity on existing lines that there is no need for freight on the new line. But that will probably be the promoter's only line and he is bound to want to maximise its use for freight, which will be important. What sort of freight will it carry? Will it be that which can be carried on a passenger train set-up? If so, why are passing loops needed? If they are not needed, why cannot the money be spent on the Boxley long tunnel instead?

Finally, because I have spoken for longer than I had intended, I again urge the Select Committee not only to use its discretion but to take into account the Boxley long tunnel. That tunnel starts and ends within the limits of deviation, but passes outside those limits. There is a unanimous desire in Kent to have that tunnel considered by the Select Committee. It would be flying in the face of everything that has ever been meant by consultation if, in opposition to that unanimity, the Select Committee was unable to consider that deviation.

5.38 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate and, unusually, I suspect that there is a great deal of unanimity on some points. Therefore, I hope to break a bit of new ground rather than repeat points on which I already agree.

We welcome the much-delayed arrival of the Bill at the Westminster platform, but we are extremely concerned at the time that it is likely to spend in the station. The apparent precedent of the hybrid Bill for the Channel tunnel is rather an illusion. That Bill related to a major project, but there are not many householders on the bed of the English channel. In view of the Bill's complexity and the extent to which it affects the rights of individual citizens, we must recognise that Parliament has a unique responsibility to give those citizens a right to be heard.

The Bill will affect 850 acres of agricultural land, 87 agricultural holdings, 182 businesses, 21 listed buildings and 14 other buildings of historic interest. It will mean the demolition of 60 residential buildings and the loss of 75 acres of ancient woodland. Some 410 residential properties will be directly affected by noise, while a further 1,600 will be subjected to ground-borne noise and vibration. It is therefore immediately obvious that the Select Committee will have to consider a veritable harvest of petitions. Indeed, I suspect that the fact that schedule 1 has 35 pages is something of a record. We must be careful to ensure that the petitioners have a real opportunity to express their concerns.

A number of those who are already anxious about the way in which the Bill may proceed have asked that the Select Committee proceedings do not start until the petitioners at least have had the opportunity to raise their concerns with the promoters. That might be a wise precaution and could prevent the Committee from becoming bogged down at the outset. As the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said, the issue of compensation is crucial.

One issue that has not yet received much attention is access to farmland. The Railway Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 required railway companies to provide and maintain in perpetuity what were called accommodation crossings—that is, bridges and passages allowing access to land. Some 150 years later we are dealing with the first large railway proposal since that Act. Although it may not be possible exactly to replicate the rights under the Act, it would not be proper for the channel tunnel rail link simply to sweep aside those interests and concerns. Land owners and farmers want the obligations under the 1845 Act to apply in some form or another.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed concern about links to other parts of the country, especially the north. There is already a great deal of confusion about what is to happen. Railtrack East Anglia costed three options for linking the channel tunnel rail link to the east coast main line and chose the most expensive option because it knew that it would be funded by the Department of Transport—only to find that that support was not forthcoming. That is an awesome warning to others.

The Under-Secretary must persuade us tonight that he is not considering the channel tunnel rail link in isolation and that he fully understands the need for links not just to the east and west coast main lines but to Wales, the south-west and the west.

As a result of the confusion, it appears extremely unlikely that the start date of 1996 for the introduction of the north of London Eurostars will be met. I am sure that the good people of Peterborough will be looking to the Secretary of State to repeat his statement at the 1994 Conservative party conference that it would be met.

There are also concerns about the way in which the funding is likely to operate. Some of those have been articulated this evening. I draw to the attention of the House the fact that European Passenger Services has been gifted assets of £818 million while the British Rail Board, to quote the Under-Secretary's statement last March,

"retains certain contingent liabilities in respect of guarantees and indemnities which it had entered into when EPS was its subsidiary."

In other words, the private sector operator takes the assets and British Rail is left with the liabilities. That cannot give great confidence to those of us concerned about the balance of investment.

Reference has already been made tonight to freight, but I want to develop the argument further. I was part of the team to promote the rail-based link and I have always believed that the best case for a channel tunnel was the fact that it would extend the United Kingdom's rail network and link it to the continental network. That makes long-distance freight economically viable again, which is already apparent by the fast rate of development in freight services. They are a great success. The link will provide the main opportunity for piggy-back trains and there must be a commitment to that development. The substantial potential of transfer from road to rail of long-distance freight makes sense only if the link either carries freight or makes the passage of freight easier through the narrow corridors of London and Kent.

I refer to some of the points in the excellent briefing from the Freight Transport Association. The successful development of the new rail freight market is already suffering from a lack of track capacity. The completion of the high-speed link will have to free up freight on the existing network or the market will be stymied at the very moment that it needs to grow. It is extremely important that the Committee and the Bill take full account of the potential of freight. It will be important to provide freight loops near Gravesend and Ashford and there will have to be a connection to the Dollands Moor freight terminal. I hope that the Committee will take that on board.

It is clear that the provision of a link between the new line and the existing London and Chatham railway south of Gravesend will enable high-speed passenger trains to reach Waterloo international without travelling over lines used by freight services. The interrelationship between improvement to passenger services and making more effective use of freight services is critical if the Bill and the project are to attract the good will of the whole nation. This is not of concern just to the south-east; everyone in the country wants the balance to be right for the best of all reasons, both economically and environmentally.

The hon. Member for Mid-Kent referred to the fact that the people of Kent want the assurance that domestic services will improve so that they can benefit from the increase in speed on the link. Hon Members are entitled to an assurance that journey times will be cut for the thousands of commuters from Kent. We want not vague promises but an assurance that, from day one, that benefit will come from the link operation.

The exchange between the Under-Secretary and a number of hon Members about the nature of the instructions caused me some concern. As I read the instructions, they are not attempts to tie the hands of those hon Members who serve on the Select Committee; far from it, they have been carefully phrased in terms that will guide the Committee. I agree with the Under-Secretary that, to use his words, there should not be any private arm-twisting, but I see nothing wrong with a little public arm-twisting in the mother of Parliaments. That is our responsibility on behalf of all those who will be affected by the project.

I and my hon. Friends support both instructions. As a large number of hon. Members on both sides of the House share our view, I hope that the Select Committee will take account of that fact even if the instructions are not pressed to a Division.

Reference has been made to a number of Kent concerns and they are epitomised in the instructions. I am especially concerned about the anxieties expressed in east London and in our debate about the extent to which the Secretary of State means what he says. In opening the debate, he said that he wanted to commit himself to a route "that minimises environmental damage". In a number of important respects, that does not appear to be the case in Islington and in other council areas in east London and Essex. I am glad to see hon. Members nodding in agreement.

For example, the Baxter B option in the borough of Islington is clearly intended to fulfil the Secretary of State's promise. The fact that he was not prepared to endorse it this afternoon was disappointing. I am sure that the compensation issue will loom large in the Committee's considerations. At this stage, we cannot give more than the general instruction that has been given in the two statements this afternoon. I hope that Committee members will, in due course, take those into account.

It is clear that the Bill's tortuous parliamentary route makes it extremely unlikely that work on the link will start before the last possible date for the next general election. Inevitably then, its progress—hon. Members have referred to this already—will coincide with Government attempts to sell off Railtrack. The two processes are inextricably entwined. I and my right hon. and hon. Friends wish to make it clear that we do not believe that Railtrack can be fully privatised before polling day for the next general election.

The reasons are, first, that potential financiers have started to do their sums. They know that many of the claimed assets, such as tunnels and bridges, are huge

potential liabilities. Secondly, the failure of the private finance initiative casts even more gloom in the City. Its only application will almost certainly be to the channel tunnel rail link. It will not be used anywhere else in the railway system. It will not be available because it simply cannot stack up as a financial prospect.

Thirdly, the costs of privatisation of operating services and the on-cost pressure on franchisees, together with continuing subsidy constraints on British Rail, do not bode well for Railtrack's profitability. Finally, investors must know by now that, even if a majority still exists in the House for privatisation, it certainly does not exist among the public at large. It is unthinkable that a by-election candidate who is committed to privatisation will be elected to the House between now and the next general election, and Ministers know how vulnerable the Government's majority is.

City investors are no fools. Even if privatisation made progress before the next general election, they know that it would be halted in its tracks immediately after polling day. I noticed that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who is not here at the moment, said nothing on the subject this afternoon. He seems to have been sidelined in the debate of the past few days.

I make it crystal clear that I and my colleagues in the Liberal Democratic party will do everything in our power to retain or reclaim a 51 per cent. golden share in Railtrack, so that the rail network can provide a successful public service. We believe that the project before the House could be derailed by a dogmatic insistence on privatisation of that network.

5.52 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I welcome the fact that we have finally reached Second Reading of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill. I do not believe that Opposition Members can make any political runs on the subject of the delay, for the reasons that were well made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). I say to Treasury Ministers, however, that, in the current new phase of this century-old project, the Treasury has taken an inordinately long time to get from the first proposals to this day.

By my calculations, it has taken six years, six months and two days to go from 14 July 1988, when British Rail first announced its three alternative routes for the scheme, to 16 January 1995 and Second Reading of the Bill. In the process, we have had four Secretaries of State for Transport, and—perhaps this is more relevant for us as hon. Members representing our constituencies—thousands, probably nearer tens of thousands, of people have personally suffered the ravages of blight as a result of the delay and uncertainty which has been generated by the project.

I do not wish to be negative; indeed, I will support Second Reading of the Bill tonight. I wish to be forward-looking, but perhaps I might be allowed one last backward glance. I represent a constituency which, perhaps more than any other along the line of the route, has suffered the ravages of blight on a huge scale as a result of the publication of rail lines which have been put in the public domain and subsequently abandoned. I know that the constituents of many of my hon. Friends representing Kent have suffered considerably in the same way.

I hope that at least one lesson has been learnt by British Rail—it should never again come forward with major proposals for new railway lines that are initially ill conceived and ill thought through, and, as certainly happened in one case, have no chance of being built for environmental reasons.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is still a need for some flexibility from British Rail to avoid unnecessary blight? For example, a danger exists in Rainham, which is in the borough in which my constituency is located, that the route will run unnecessarily close to buildings. Were it to be moved 150 m, as has been proposed, that would make a substantial difference to the well-being of the people who live there. The opportunity still exists to put right such minor discrepancies before this otherwise excellent scheme goes forward.

Sir John Stanley: I am sure that my hon. Friend will make his own constituency speech in his own way. I shall mention another deviation in relation to my part of Kent later.

Initially, the project progressed in a far from professional way, not least in relation to the proposal that is known in our part of the world as the notorious route three proposal, which would have cut a noise swathe through the finest environmental countryside in Kent. I do not believe that the possibility ever existed that it would be built. It was widely reported at the time that route three had been traced out on tracing paper on the kitchen table of the British Rail project engineer who was responsible for the project. I am glad to say that, in due course, it was abandoned.

A great deal of unnecessary blight has been created, and in human terms, that has inflicted great anxiety and distress on a great many people. Having said that, this is one of the occasions on which the last state of affairs is a vast improvement on the first. I should like to express my personal thanks to the three immediate predecessors of the Secretary of State for Transport. I thank the noble Lord Parkinson, who, during his tenure of the Department of Transport, was responsible for presiding over—and, I believe, strongly supporting—the ditching of route three by BR, to the relief of thousands of my constituents.

I also thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) who, with great vision and great determination, overruled BR on its preferred route and adopted what was then called the Ove Arup route, which provides the basis for the route in the Bill.

Finally, I express my personal appreciation to my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), who, to my delight, responded to my strong representations that he should abandon the surface route across the Medway gap in my constituency, which would have had serious blighting and environmentally destructive effects, and replace it with a tunnel route under Bluebell hill. They were three profoundly important ministerial decisions, and I am delighted that they have resulted in a Bill that I am able to support strongly.

As hon. Members have said, the Bill has been improved, but I believe that it is still capable of other improvements, which I hope will be undertaken before the Bill leaves this House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said, the environmental cost of the present route immediately to the west of the current

[Sir John Stanley]

Bluebell hill tunnel is unacceptable. There is great demand in Kent for the Boxley long tunnel, which would be a substantial improvement.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will reconsider what he said about the guidance that he proposes to give to the Select Committee. He has made it clear that he will offer only guidance, but I do not believe that it is appropriate for him to offer guidance to a Select Committee to the effect that it should not consider alternative proposals that may be outside the limits of deviation. Members of Select Committees are entitled to form their own views, based on the evidence put before them, on what they should consider.

My right hon. Friend will have heard the strong representations from members of all parties in relation to the Boxley long tunnel. As he is a thinking and considerate person, I hope that he will take careful note of what has been said, and reflect further on what guidance it is appropriate for him to give the Select Committee in the light of our Second Reading debate.

I must also deal again with the issue to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State was kind enough to listen during what was probably the last all-night sitting on the Consolidated Fund Bill. The debate began at 6.58 am on 15 December last year and dealt with the voluntary purchase scheme in relation to the channel tunnel rail link. As I said then, the voluntary purchase scheme is wholly inadequate—something that has been repeated by members of all parties. It is not right that a major public project such as this link should be had "on the cheap" at the expense of individual householders. British Rail and the private consortium have to accept their moral and ethical responsibilities.

I shall not weary the House by repeating everything that I said during the Adjournment debate. However, as it may be of interest, I wish to put some details on the record for the benefit of the Select Committee, which I hope will consider them.

On 15 December, I made a specific, concrete and precedented proposal. We can argue until the cows come home about whether a particular property is blighted. It is necessary to establish an independent procedure to ascertain whether a property is blighted, and another independent procedure to ensure that the property of the householder involved can be acquired.

I proposed that the procedure should operate as follows: where there is a dispute between the individual householder and British Rail about whether a House is blighted by the scheme and the dispute cannot be resolved, the district valuer should offer an independent, open market, unblighted valuation of the property. The individual should be told that he may market his property at that valuation and no more for a set period—conceivably, three, six or nine months. If, at the end of that period, the property has not been sold at the district valuer's valuation, I believe that it is entirely reasonable to expect British Rail to buy the property at that stage.

I said that such a procedure was precedented. It is directly precedented by the Department of Transport, and is being used in my constituency in the discharge of the Department's obligations under section 62 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, which enables the Department to buy blighted houses for highways schemes outside the physical limits of statutory blight. In the Adjournment debate, I cited a specific ministerial letter that offered that procedure to a constituent of mine in the context of a house purchase.

We therefore have a viable independent procedure which is already being operated by the Department of Transport in a highways capacity. Surely that provides a means of resolving the problem. I hope that the Minister and the Select Committee will consider it carefully.

The final issue is freight. Over the years, I have listened to many statements on freight from Ministers and others. The statements from Ministers, and those from British Rail, have always been somewhat equivocal about how much freight they want to allow on the line. I have never understood the tentativeness about freight on this high-speed line. If one is going to make a multi-billion pound investment, it surely makes sense to use the line to the greatest possible extent. At night, there could be no conflict with passenger trains, as I do not believe that there will be a huge demand to leave London at 1 am and arrive in Paris at 3.30 am. There will, in effect, be a void line at night, and one could surely make extensive use of it for freight purposes.

I was concerned by the Secretary of State's opening remarks. He suggested that there might be an opportunity to increase the amount of freight on the existing lines. The problem is that the existing lines—not only the Tonbridge line but the Maidstone, East line, which passes through my constituency—is wholly unsuited in environmental terms to carrying night-time freight.

Reference has already been made to the proximity of lines to homes in London. On the Maidstone, East line, homes have been built up to its very edge. In environmental terms, I believe that the new line is the best for running night-time freight.

I end with a final postscript. From my voluminous filing cabinet containing papers relating to the channel tunnel rail link, I have taken a press release issued by the British Railways Board on 3 November 1989. It is headed "Parliamentary Bill in 1990". It would appear that this particular legislative train is running approximately five years late.

I think that we are all now firmly agreed that the line's completion is very much in the national interest, and, as far as I am aware, everyone in Kent believes that it is very much in Kent's interest. I hope that Ministers and British Rail will now make every possible effort to ensure that the high-speed line is now built on a high-speed programme, as quickly as possible.

6.8 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) did well to remind us that it is more than six years since British Rail first published the three routes for the fast link to the channel tunnel. He castigated British Rail, but I remind him in passing that it was at ministerial insistence that the schemes were published.

We have heard much from the Conservative Members about the necessity of transferring British Rail to the private sector, and about how ministerial interference should cease once that has happened. However, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling said, or confessed, or whatever term one cares to use, that the Ove Arup route that we are discussing was chosen by a previous Secretary of State for Transport. I remind the

House in passing that the announcement about the Ove Arup route came initially from the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the then Secretary of State for the Environment, who talked about the need to revitalise the east London corridor. I know that my hon. Friends who represent the Newham area will talk about the need for an international station at Stratford; I will come back to that point.

Running a high-speed route through the east London corridor and not stopping there is a rum way in which to revitalise the area. I am not sure how the revitalisation would be carried out by the passage of the high-speed trains; but that is the reason given for the choice of route. I hope that, when Conservative Members talk about ministerial interference in these matters, they will bear in mind the fact that it was ministerial interference that brought about the choice. As I have said, it is a strange way in which to revitalise a part of London.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling also reminded us that he has continually talked about the unsuitability for freight of the existing railway line through Tonbridge—remarkably enough, in his own constituency. I have spoken to the right hon. Gentleman about the matter before. I remember that, in an exchange in the House, I cited the freight-working timetable for 1965, when scores of freight trains passed along the route through Tonbridge.

Before we fall for the sob story that railway freight is terribly destructive of the environment, I remind the House that the trains in the 1960s were predominantly loose-coupled freight trains, with all the associated noise. The right hon. Gentleman must do a bit better to convince us that the freight generated by the project must be confined to the high-speed route. I agree, however, that some of it, especially time-sensitive freight, should go on that route.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who is not in his place at the moment, took us on a rather selective canter around the history of the channel tunnel project and the associated rail link. He went back to early 1974, and the cancellation by the incoming Labour Government of the channel tunnel project, which, at that time, was exclusively in the public sector.

I remember the occasion well. I went to see Tony Crosland, the then Secretary of State for the Environment, when the rumours first emerged, and pleaded with him not to cancel the project. I got singularly short shrift. He said, "Young man"—you can tell how long ago it was, Mr. Deputy Speaker—"the Government, whom you are expected to support, have inherited three major projects from the Conservative party." They were Maplin airport—who remembers that these days?—Concorde and the channel tunnel.

Tony Crosland said, "Privately, I would love to be able to cancel Concorde and go for the channel tunnel, but, unfortunately, neither the French nor my right hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South-East"—who was in the Cabinet at that time—"will allow me to cancel Concorde. I am afraid that we are stuck and that I must cancel the channel tunnel project."

In an earlier intervention, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) pointed out how lucky it was for the public sector that, when the channel tunnel project considerably overran, the burden of the overrun fell on the private rather than the public sector. I immediately thought of Concorde, and wondered what the hon. Gentleman would say about that considerable overrun. I remember that we spent 10 times the original estimate so that we could fly pop stars to America more quickly. Not much was said about the cost overrun at that time.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield treated us to a rather selective look at history. I regretted the cancellation of the channel tunnel project in 1974, to such an extent that I voted against the cancellation, as did others of my hon. Friends with railway connections. Inasmuch as I have any interest to declare in this project, it is that I am a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Ah.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman says, "Ah." I was waiting for that. He will now have to write that fact down.

The project is described as the first main line in the United Kingdom in 100 years; that is a rather unfortunate description. I seem to remember that the previous new main line was the great central main line, which, sadly, was axed following the rule of Dr. Beeching. Few of us will be here to see the 21st century. I must be careful about saying that; my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) will probably be here. If a future Dr. Beeching remembers that precedent, he may look again at the fast link to the channel tunnel.

One hopes not, given the amount of passengers and freight for which the line is designed to cater. There is no doubt that there is a need to increase capacity, and there is no doubt of the unsuitability of the electrified third-rail former Southern Railways routes through Kent for the future. When one considers the popularity of the new Eurostar trains, one can see that there is considerable demand for extra rail capacity, and that demand will increase greatly in the years to come.

I mentioned the Stratford international station earlier. I compliment my hon. Friends from Newham on their campaign over the years for an international station at Stratford. Having, I hope, pleased them by my earlier remarks about the east London corridor, and about the fact that I could not see the sense of running trains through an area without stopping to revitalise it, I must tell them that I am by no means convinced of their case for an international station at Stratford, for the reasons that I have outlined before.

Getting from Stratford to Birmingham by train is no easy task. Although I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) when he talked about the dozen or so routes emanating from Stratford, I point out that none of them gives an especially high-speed route to the north-east, the north-west or the midlands. Unless assurances are given that that deficiency in the existing rail network can be remedied, making a case for an international station at Stratford will always be difficult.

When thinking about political interference, I am reminded that, when the route was chosen by the Government, King's Cross was intended to be the terminal station in London. We were told that King's Cross was essential, because it was a through station, and

[Mr. Snape]

that there was no alternative if we wanted to have connections to the north-east, the north-west and the midlands. Suddenly—

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury) *rose—*

Mr. Snape: I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). There was a great row about whether King's Cross was a suitable terminal for the high-speed link, which, if not led, was ably supported, by my hon. Friend. Suddenly, King's Cross, which had been essential, was not essential, and St. Pancras was chosen as the alternative. Does my hon. Friend want me to give way?

Mr. Smith: No.

Mr. Snape: St. Pancras—

Mr. Spearing: Twenty yards away.

Mr. Snape: St. Pancras, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South points out, is 20 yd from King's Cross. Although it is some years since I was a railway signalman, I remember that the operational difficulties at a terminal station with through trains are greater than they are at a through station. I do not think that we shall fly north once we arrive—if we ever do—at St. Pancras as we might have done if we had arrived at King's Cross, the original choice.

I hope that the Minister will tell us whether the Hampstead chord, which appeared in a British Rail works Bill some years ago and which was approved by the House, is still going to be built once the high-speed rail link is built. Memory fails me on the rules, although I understand that, if these projects do not go ahead within a specific period, the parliamentary powers lapse. We need some assurances from the Minister that, if it takes until 2002 for the link to be opened, it will be possible to go via the Hampstead chord to the west coast main line, in which I have a particular interest.

I have listened to the argument about the need or otherwise for a railway station at Ebbsfleet. The hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who has now left the Chamber, said that he was convinced of the need for a station there, although he mentioned Ashford and Stratford as well.

The hon. Member said that British Rail and its successors in this project appear reluctant to site railway stations through Kent. If we are to have a high-speed railway line, by its very nature it would not help if there were stations every few miles. When the hon. Gentleman was advocating stations through Kent and one at Stratford as well, I was imagining—I shall say it in English because I could not attempt to say it in French, although, anyway, it would be outside the rules of the House—the train announcer at the Gare du Nord in Paris announcing the Eurostar calling at Ashford and all stations via Stratford to St. Pancras.

A multiplicity of stations along the route is not a particularly high-speed way in which to run things. However, I spoke as recently as last week to Councillor Mark James from Kent county council, and I understand the council's support for Ebbsfleet.

I repeat that I understand and commend the campaign that has been waged by my hon. Friends the Members who represent Newham for an international station at Stratford.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am following closely what my hon. Friend is saying, but does he not now accept that a station at Stratford would help to take a great deal of passenger pressure off the St. Pancras terminus, and would provide good London connections and direct connections to all of East Anglia? Surely that would be an advantage. We are not talking about the train stopping at every station between Dover and London, as happens at present: we are talking about one stop.

Mr. Snape: I accept my hon. Friend's point, but I am yet to be convinced that many people travelling on the Eurostar trains would want to get to the sort of destinations that they would easily be able to reach from Stratford. However, that is a matter for the Select Committee to consider.

I am not saying that there is not a case for the station at Stratford. I acknowledge that there is a case. I am merely saying that, as a Member who represents a constituency north of London, I cannot see any great benefit for my constituents from an international station at Stratford. I shall leave that point, on the basis that it is for the Select Committee to decide.

There is also an enormous demand for better freight facilities. We have seen the private sector too becoming involved in various parts of the country in the planning of freight terminals. I understand that there is a terminal on the stocks for Hams Hall near Birmingham, and there a terminal is certainly planned in the north-east. That shows the amount of freight which would switch from road to rail if the facilities were provided.

I return to a point with which some of my hon. Friends will disagree. I have listened carefully to this debate, and I understand the reasons why some of my hon. Friends propose extensive tunnelling along the line of the high-speed link. But, in my view, one of the great attractions of train travel—I confess to be greatly enamoured of that mode of travel—is the ability to look out of the window.

While we all accept the need for a tunnel under the channel—there would be some difficulty in getting between Britain and France any other way, given the geography—it would not be fair or reasonable, and it certainly would be extremely expensive, to have tunnels all the way, whether from St. Pancras or Stratford or wherever, and much of the way through Kent.

The hon. Member for Mid-Kent would not answer a question to which an answer was fairly obvious. There is no tunnelling in respect of the M20 motorway, and he said that that has led to a sort of creeping planning blight. But it is surely up to the planning authorities to ensure that that does not happen because of the channel tunnel rail link. If the authorities cannot do that, it is somewhat unfair of them and others, whether the money is to be found from either public or private sources, to expect that money to be found from either source so that tunnelling, which is perhaps not essential, is carried out.

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend must surely accept that the four specific areas of tunnelling which are being proposed would be a very small addition to the overall amount of tunnelling on the line. Frankly, I do not think

that the people travelling on the trains would be particularly upset if they were to lose 20 seconds of view of the back gardens of houses in Gifford street in my constituency, which would be avoided by putting a tunnel in the Caledonian road area.

Mr. Snape: I could have guaranteed that my hon. Friend, with his customary helpfulness, would have mentioned at least one street in his constituency.

Mr. Corbyn: He lives there.

Mr. Snape: I am sure that he does not does live there, or he would declare an interest, too.

Mr. Smith *indicated assent.*

Mr. Snape: Oh, he does live there. Well, in that case, I shall readily concede the need for a tunnel. That is the sort of personal interest that all of us in this House can appreciate. If my hon. Friend would confine his support to his own back garden, the whole project might be considerably less expensive.

More seriously, those of us who served on the Committee which considered the Channel Tunnel Bill were aware of the distress caused to those people whose properties were to be swept away. The Committee at that time treated those who facing that awful prospect with enormous sympathy. We would have liked to do more, but, of course, the rules precluded us from doing so.

There is an argument, probably not best made here, that there is surely a more sensible way in which to compensate people than the method we currently use. I am conscious that parliamentary legislation is drafted by lawyers, as are all the legal statutes, so it is probably a vain plea, but surely it would be much more sensible if we were to say that, if someone's house were to be taken because of the need for the channel tunnel work, their house would be independently valued, and around 120 per cent. of the value would be paid instantly to persuade the people to move and to enable them to refurnish their house.

That suggestion would stop those expensive public inquiries, so it is, of course, totally impractical from a legal point of view. However, that seems to be a much more sensible way to proceed than the current method we adopt. Similarly, with the 2,000 people already mentioned whose lives are to be considerably affected by the noise of passing trains, the existing laws are not adequate. I hope that we can look again at the compensation that may be provided.

All the matters that I have touched on are for the Select Committee to consider. It promises to be a fairly long-drawn-out Committee, as is often the case, but it is incumbent on the members of that Committee to look sympathetically at the pleas, especially of those who are about to lose their homes. Although there is a comparatively small number of such people for a project of this size, nevertheless they ought to be generously treated.

This Bill has been a long time coming, and it commands widespread support in the House. I hope that the starting date of 2002 can be brought forward. Certainly, if those oft-expressed views about the desirability of transferring freight especially from road to rail and the desirability of using our railway system better are to come to fruition, the sooner the line is built the better.

6.27 pm

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): Perish the thought that we should ever face another Labour Government. It would be ironic, knowing what a hash all Labour Governments ever make of capital or public finance, if the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) found himself in the same position as he did back in 1974, of having to plead with a Labour Secretary of State not to cancel the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill. Given the open-ended commitment and the high cost of the project to the public purse, that is just within the realms of possibility.

Without apology, I am a long-standing chunnel and rail link sceptic. However, it would be churlish of me or anybody else not to acknowledge the remarkable achievement of those who have driven the tunnel project forward to where it is today, and all those who have striven strenuously over several years to produce the current railway project and this Bill. It is also fair to say that there has been unprecedented consultation.

It is quite remarkable that the number of areas in dispute are now so relatively few. However small in number, those areas are of immense importance to all the people concerned, including those in Kent, Essex and London, and I urge to the utmost that the Government and the Select Committee provide every reasonable opportunity, even beyond the strict rules of petitioning, to ensure that the arguments of those people are fully considered, and that justice is not only done but is seen to be done. That is why I appended my name to the Opposition instruction. I believe that it is fairly sensible and moderate. It does not seek to shackle the Committee's hand, or to impose any prejudged issues upon it.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads suggested earlier that the Government would take a very relaxed view if the Select Committee were to consider the options to which I have referred. I am obviously particularly concerned about the Boxley long tunnel option in Kent. That option is supported by virtually the whole of the county.

However, the Minister did not really say that he would take such a relaxed view. In order to maintain the bipartisan approach which has been such a feature of the debate, it would be helpful if my hon. Friend said that the Government would be fairly relaxed in their attitude to the Select Committee when it considers the range of options.

Mr. Watts: If, as my hon. Friend suggests, the Select Committee were to decide to consider petitions relating to the options in the instruction, it would make no difference what view the Government took, because the Select Committee would have done what I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his opening remarks have said it should do: that is, make its own decisions. It would have taken its decisions in the light of the advice that my right hon. Friend and I have stated quite clearly on many occasions.

It would not matter whether I felt relaxed about that. The Select Committee would be fulfilling its proper

[Mr. Watts]

function in reaching its own decisions in considering the petitions that it decided that it should consider, and then reporting back to the House.

Sir Roger Moate: A great deal depends upon the form in which the advice is tendered to whoever is chosen as Chairman of that Committee. That is a very important consideration.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend referred to the form in which the advice is given to the Chairman of the Committee. Let me make it clear: there will be no private advice to any member of the Select Committee. The advice will be given by counsel for the Department and for the promoters of the link in open session to the Select Committee when it is considering those matters. As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), there will be no private, behind-the-Chair arm twisting advice from me to any member of the Select Committee.

Sir Roger Moate: I hope that the members of the Committee—alas, we do not know who they will be—will pay close heed to what is said. I do not believe that there is a desire to impose strict rules or to force a vote. However, with regard to parts of London we know about, or to those we do not, it is important that petitioners and objectors from those areas should be given a fair and generous hearing. That is all that one is after, because none of us can know the arguments for and against each of the propositions.

We live in an age when there are many opportunities for enlightened consultation. Parliament would expect the Select Committee to be fair and generous in its treatment of the arguments. I hope that the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister and of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will ensure that all those with concerns will be heard.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) that the Select Committee need be arduous or drawn out. The Bill is big, but there has been exhaustive consultation so far. The Select Committee should be able to encompass matters in the instruction, and other tunnels and aspects, fairly, swiftly and conscientiously. That is expected, and it would reflect credit upon the hybrid Bill procedure and on Parliament.

We will have to wait to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister says when he replies to the debate, but I hope that that is the message that will go out loud and clear, that the Boxley long tunnel will be considered, and that all other areas directly affected will receive a fair opportunity before the Select Committee.

As a long-standing sceptic, I believe that there is a mood, reflected in the House today, among the sceptics and critics, and even among those whose properties are directly threatened, that the uncertainty has prevailed for too long, that blight has existed for too long, and that, in Macbeth's words:

> "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly".

After all these years of delay and uncertainty, the message is that we must proceed rapidly. However, the procedure must be done well. It must be understood that there are still detailed and fundamental questions which must be addressed by the Select Committee and the Standing Committee. Many of those questions affect our county of Kent.

I am not quite sure why this should be, but I understand that, by precedence, Kent Members, or Members in the counties affected, cannot be members of the Select Committee. I cannot see why that is the case if our constituencies are not directly affected, but if that is the case, so be it. However, I hope that the counties concerned will have a strong representation on the Standing Committee. That would allow us to take up some of the very genuine and real issues.

Several of my colleagues have referred to the case made by hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent about the Boxley long tunnel. I describe that as the long tunnel that avoids the Boxley valley. Others are affected more directly, but everyone who lives in or cherishes the north downs of Kent will share the determination throughout the county that the route should not be allowed to inflict such irreversible damage on that designated area of outstanding natural beauty.

The long tunnel option would add about two miles of tunnel, and perhaps 40 seconds in a tunnel for the rail traveller. The extra cost would be quite small in relation to the cost of a £3 billion project. For those who are not familiar with that most beautiful area of English countryside, I suggest that they walk along the Pilgrims way—as I hope members of the Select Committee might find time to—on the scarp slope of the north downs and look down on the Boxley valley. They will then see why it is so important to keep that area of outstanding countryside and that natural belt between the two great conurbations which would otherwise threaten to merge.

I will be brief, as I know many hon. Members wish to speak. I apologise to the House for having to leave in a few moments for a constituency engagement. However, I want to raise several major concerns which I hope we will have an opportunity to emphasise in the Standing Committee.

We must consider the question of compensation. We have not yet finally faced up to the real implications of compensation, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) said. That issue must be addressed properly in Standing Committee.

We must also consider the question of vertical deviation. That sounds very technical, but it is fundamentally important to people in the villages on the route. If the level of the rail could be raised another 3 m, that would dramatically alter the impact on the people concerned.

There is a widespread illusion abroad that the link will somehow be of major assistance in taking a great deal of freight off our roads. I was first attracted to the Arup route because it conceived a superb linking into a national freight network. Alas, we do not have that. The truth is that the high-speed link will take very little freight. It is not a freight route. If we examine the words of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State carefully, we can see that he made that clear.

A briefing note makes that point even more clearly:

> "The growing volume of freight traffic through the Channel Tunnel will make use of the capacity freed up on existing lines when the Link is open. Plans for the Link do not preclude its use for freight traffic, with provision for two passing loops."

What enthusiasm that conveys. One could hardly have anything more minimalist than that. Apart from high-value freight in small quantities, hardly any freight will be carried on the high-speed link.

The consequences of that are serious. Freight will be transferred on to existing routes, using existing lines, thus intensifying the noise problem in areas which have long since forgotten the kind of noise that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East loves so dearly. His love affair with the railways is well known, but it is not shared by many constituents. They do not want old-fashioned freight trains bashing along the bottom of their gardens. It is a serious new issue.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman provokes me. Do his constituents prefer the sound of heavy goods vehicles on motorways?

Sir Roger Moate: The hon. Gentleman never misses an opportunity to hit out at road transport. That is a fact of life. Of course my constituents are equally concerned about heavy goods vehicles on motorways. There are equal battles about noise insulation. It is not a matter of one or the other. I hope that the Select Committee or the Standing Committee—I am not sure which—will reconsider freight transport. Does the Bill represent a missed opportunity? Could we encourage other ways of linking the freight system?

On financing, it is for the Standing Committee to find some answers. I do not believe that such a Bill has ever stated:

"The exact amount of the overall public sector financial contribution is not yet known".

We know why we do not know, but the truth is that we still do not know.

We all welcome the project as a flagship of the private finance initiative—quite right—but the great thing about private finance is that the risk is taken by the private sector. I fear that such a project could face extensive overruns, could be delayed, and could go well beyond planned costs. The private sector could fail. Who would then risk carrying on, perhaps, a half-finished project?

We must be sure that there is a cap, and that the taxpayer will not have to foot unlimited bills in future. We must be sure that the private sector puts up the bonding and bank guarantees necessary to ensure that the project reaches fruition. Again, very little is known at this stage; the matter is to be explored before the Bill reaches the statute book.

When the high-speed link is built, the people of Kent could have one of the finest commuter services in the country, and we would be grateful for that. Travelling time would be reduced dramatically—how wonderful that would be. It is clear that there will be a first-class premium service, for which premium fares will be demanded. Not everybody could afford premium fares. It is essential to have that service and to have a first-class—in the right sense of the word—rail service through the existing south-eastern train company, and good rolling stock at prices that the company can afford.

Our worry is that we do not know how the two would interrelate. What will be the interface between the premium service and the ordinary service? How can we be sure that we will continue to have public operating subsidies for our existing trains and capital investment in existing train services?

We want assurances. Yes, we welcome the wonderful new commuter service—it could be superb—but we are also entitled to expect that our existing trains will continue to receive the support they need. Again, we must explore that matter in the Standing Committee and in the Select Committee if we are to secure the benefits for Kent that the high-speed link might provide.

6.43 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The House should acknowledge that Lady Thatcher and President Mitterrand have their fingerprints on the project. It would be churlish not to acknowledge that the project will be a memorial to them. They share two characteristics: greatness and despotism. Such people often wish to leave behind bricks and mortar—big projects—as memorials to themselves, and this is one of them.

The channel tunnel project is marvellous. It is time that we acknowledged that; the engineering feat is considerable.

Mr. Tyler: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: No, I shall not give way, because many hon. Members wish to speak and I want to develop my arguments.

I pay tribute to everyone involved in the successful construction of the channel tunnel. It is a pity that that great engineering project will be spoilt by the fact that the link is inappropriate, inadequate, late and on the wrong route. The route makes neither transportation sense nor engineering sense. That is a great pity.

Were it not for the fact that my hon. Friends, together with some Conservative Members, have tabled a sensible and prudent instruction for debate, I should wish to divide the House against the Bill. It is offensive and grossly unfair to many of my constituents, but I join hon. Members in trying to temper its effect and, perhaps, even improve it by the House giving an instruction to the Committee to consider tunnelling in several sensitive areas and to have regard to minimising the environmental loss to people in Kent, Essex and London. For that reason, I will certainly support the motion on the instruction and will refrain from dividing the House against the Bill.

I should explain why I feel angry about the line of route. Time and again, the public and Parliament have been told that a final decision has been made on the line. What causes us most irritation in Thurrock is that the flagship newspaper announcement during the week of the October 1991 Conservative party conference was by Secretary of State Rifkind, who said that he had decided the final line of route. Everyone in my borough was relieved; the line of route did not go through our borough and ruin industries and properties.

There was then a change of Secretary of State. As has been the fashion in the project, there was a change of view. Soon after, Secretary of State MacGregor announced a variation in that line of route, bringing it under the River Thames like a bootlace, out at Thurrock, through the pillars of the Queen Elizabeth II bridge on its way westward to London, on its way creating havoc and devastation for many properties and residents in my constituency. We think that it is grossly unfair that, after the Government's announcement at the Tory party conference, the line of route was varied again.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

One must ask why the route was varied. It was varied because of the selfish commercial considerations of those who own or have interests in the site at Ebbsfleet. The variation of route was consequent upon the decision to site the international station at Ebbsfleet. For that reason—I do not say this facetiously—the people who own that site might feel that they should make a contribution to the cost of tunnelling or of ameliorating the effects of the line of route in my constituency and probably in others as well.

It will not be forgotten in my constituency that a vice-chairman of the Conservative party was able to lobby on behalf of the interests of the Ebbsfleet project and yet, under the rules of the House—I make no complaint about it—did not have to declare it in the Register of Members' Interests. We find that very regrettable. As a side issue, it questions whether hon. Members should be aligned with prestigious commercial and profitable projects that they might be able to affect in their capacity to influence Ministers and to bend their ears.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: I will not give way, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, because many hon. Members wish to contribute.

As a consequence of all that, a very bad taste has been left in my constituency and in the borough. We feel that we have been dealt with unfairly. The line of route has been influenced not by transportation or engineering considerations but by the capacity of some individuals in high places to influence on behalf of commercial interests rather than on behalf of the wider community.

If energy is not used in this place to persuade the Committee to demand that tunnelling be undertaken or moneys spent—public or private—to minimise environmental effects, it will be a great tragedy. This project is clearly the flagship project of our generation in the House, as it will endure for at least 100 years. It is a pity that we shall spoil it in this rather mean way because we are unable to find the funding to minimise the environmental effects on the community.

My constituency—other hon. Members have explained the difficulties in their constituencies—will be disadvantaged by an extremely ugly viaduct that will sweep across it. Earlier today, I invited hon. Members to raise their eyes to the Gallery around the Chamber. The viaduct is to be at least as high as the highest seating in the Gallery, and it will be situated at the end of people's gardens. I invite hon. Members—particularly the Minister—to pause and consider how they would feel if they were to discover that such a wretched viaduct was to be built at the end of their garden. It would be wholly repugnant, and the Minister would be as sick as a dog.

The Minister would not be able to sell his house, and that is the rub. Thousands of people along the route, who are not affected by the line of route going through their front rooms, will certainly have their properties blighted by the loss of visual or aural amenities. The Government must recognise that it is a matter of fairness.

I do not understood why the Minister has been so grudging. Why has he not said that the Government have been persuaded that there is at least a case for the Committee to examine the tunnelling and other aspects of the instruction tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), which is supported by the hon. Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) and other Conservative Members? The instruction makes sense. It would save a lot of time if the Minister said that the Government will not resist what is demonstrably a reasonable request. It is nothing more than that.

The instruction does not say that there shall be tunnelling. It says that the House would like the Committee to pay special attention to the need to examine tunnelling. What on earth is wrong with that? I guess that the Minister has been instructed by other Ministers above him. He is a new Minister, and he must not buckle. That is what happens in politics, and it is a pity.

I should like the Minister to make a name for himself by bucking the trend and saying that he has been persuaded that there is a case for the Government to join other hon. Members in asking the Committee to examine whether tunnelling can be carried out.

Mr. Watts: I may be able to help the hon. Gentleman, although not quite in the way he hopes. The Government clearly are not persuaded by the arguments; otherwise we would have included them in the Bill. It is for the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members who support the options to persuade the Select Committee that, notwithstanding the view of the Government, it should look at the options for which they have argued cogently.

I will urge the House to resist the instruction to the Committee. I believe that the Committee is better able to use its discretion if it is not fettered. Committee members should take account of the cogent arguments that the hon. Gentleman and other Members have made during the debate. Those arguments will no doubt be made in support of the petitions that will be presented to the Committee for consideration.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am disappointed that the Minister is not able to be anything other than churlish. He has not read the mood of the House, where there is widespread support for the instruction.

The Bill faces a long road. Like many other Members, I shall join my constituents in petitioning against the worst aspects of it.

Sir Roger Moate: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Hon. Members: Keep going.

Mr. Mackinlay: I wish to conclude, Madam Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not aware of anything that would prevent the hon. Gentleman from concluding.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Minister will not be able to pretend that he is the Archangel Gabriel in this matter to constituents in Kent, Essex and London whose properties have been blighted. I acknowledge that many of the Conservative Members who have already spoken will use their good offices, in the House and outside, to argue that the need to minimise the environmental effects should be considered sensitively.

The Minister will be blamed in constituencies that are suffering, and I will not hesitate to draw attention to the fact that he turned down an opportunity to recognise that this project is affecting thousands of people—often

Conservative voters—whose properties are blighted and who, in consequence, are suffering great financial and emotional distress.

6.55 pm

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): May I join other hon. Members who have spoken in welcoming the Bill? I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) in not exactly being overwhelmed with gratitude for all that has happened in the past seven years.

Many people in Kent—my constituents and those of my hon. Friends—have had a great deal to put up with. First, they were told that there would be no need for a high-speed link at all. Then they were told that there was a strong argument for only one London terminal. Then they were told that there were to be all sorts of different routes with maximum lighting. Then they were told that the Bill would be ready for debate in 1990. Here we are in 1995, and it will still be perhaps seven or eight years before trains run on the line.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling thanked a number of previous Secretaries of State for Transport. I should like particularly to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor). My right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) has not been mentioned, but he played a significant part in fielding a lot of difficult balls. He tried to meet hon. Members from both sides of the House and to get sensible answers for them. I should also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells).

Those three were able to make a significant change in the route by passing it through the centre of Ashford and making the maximum use of Ashford station. That will benefit not only my constituency, but Kent, Sussex, Surrey and many parts to the west. That was a significant success.

My job—and, I hope, that of the Bill—is to make sure that Ashford station is fully used. We have a big advantage, as the station will open at the end of the year for the existing fast trains to Paris and Brussels. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to say how many trains he expects to serve Ashford. People were originally talking in terms of a third of them, and I hope that that proves to be so.

Problems arise in building a new station route through the centre of the town. As far as I am aware, no major building site for the route has been established within the curtilage or centre of a town outside London. I hope that the Select Committee, which will play a vital part in the matter, will be able to suggest arrangements so that all building works and access to building works can take place. That will include the construction of what is called the Barracks link, and my hon. Friend the Minister should know about that.

In Ashford alone, up to 600 heavy goods vehicles a day will serve the building sites, which will cause enormous disruption. It is vital that the route and building sites in Ashford are comprehensively considered in co-operation with the local council to mitigate the problems of construction.

The issue of compensation is also important, and not just during the building of the route. Blight must also be considered, and I echo everything that hon. Members have said about that. We are being very mean and niggardly, which is one of the major reasons why this country takes twice as long to build major capital projects as virtually any other country in the EU. It is about time that we told the Treasury, which is the ultimate force in all this, that it could save money and make people's lives a great deal better if it was a mite more generous in compensation, the blight provisions and all the other factors that affect individuals. We have just heard about the viaducts at the ends of streets in Thurrock.

In the early 1990s, a scheme provided compensation on a discretionary basis if properties were 400 m from the line. The present scheme will provide compensation if properties within 120 m of the line are required. For the new, finalised and published route, Union Railways is prepared to pay compensation only where the property itself is required.

In October 1993, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering asked Union Railways to provide and implement a new hardship scheme for properties. I should have thought that this was just the job for the complaints commissioner. We have heard nothing about him so far. He is mentioned briefly on page v of the Bill in the paragraph on manpower requirements.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will explain what the complaints commissioner will do, what his remit will be and whether he will be able to play a major role between the various participants—the construction companies, Union Railways, individual people and councils—in mitigating problems by means of the hardship fund. We need such understanding now, before the Bill is enacted. If my hon. Friend the Minister cannot provide it tonight, I hope that the Select Committee will take a long look at the matter. I hope that it will also take a long hard look at the question of blight notices and when they are served.

Freight has been mentioned several times. We are in a total muddle. I am prepared to be corrected if I am wrong, but I do not know of any TGV lines in France that carry major freight other than high-quality parcels on passenger trains. The idea of running freight trains all the way along the channel tunnel rail link is preposterous. Apart from the problems of interlocking passenger trains travelling at 186 mph and freight trains travelling at 70 to 80 mph at various times of the day and night, it just is not on.

There is no question but that the channel tunnel rail link could free a great deal of capacity not only on the Maidstone line but on the line through Tonbridge, which is now electrified through to Redhill. The line could then join up with other lines to the midlands, the north and the west. If the Ashford to Hastings line was electrified, another line right through to Southampton, Exeter and Devon and Cornwall could also be used for freight.

The type 92 locomotives that will enter service in a few months are much quieter than the diesels or earlier electric locomotives. That will bring a great deal of relief. Do we need the freight routes? Will they be built or will the land merely be reserved and planted? In my constituency and those of my hon. Friends, a considerable amount of land will be blighted because the freight routes remain in the scheme of things. It would be much better if we could decide, if not tonight certainly during the passage of the Bill, whether we want the freight routes. In my view, we could get rid of them and remove a major blight within the parish of Charing.

[Sir Keith Speed]

The issue of commuter lines should also be carefully examined. The speed of travel for passengers from Dover, Folkestone, Ashford, Ebbsfleet and Stratford through to London and further on would be increased. Will there be a premium fare? Will it be so large that it will be like a first-class, Concorde-type fare compared with a world traveller fare for everyone else? If the gap was too large, it would be counter-productive, but there might be a reasonable premium that first and standard class passengers were prepared to pay. The advantages for tourism, business and work travel in north and south-east Kent would be considerable. It would perhaps make up for the appalling service that our commuters have suffered in the past 30 or 40 years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) mentioned commuters. Unless we are prepared to replace the existing Kent coast stock in the near future, the number of breakdowns caused by those coaches of great antiquity—many are 35 or 40 years old—will cause increasing delays to Eurostar services. Delays have already occurred because the trains have broken down. I was unable to catch a train on Thursday evening because a train had failed. I am told by railway engineers in my constituency who know about such matters that the increase in failures in the next four or five years will be considerable. I understand that the problem has been taken up by British Rail. It will have to look hard at the problem with my hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friends who represent Kent constituencies, who will bring pressure to bear on British Rail.

We have had a great many problems in the past seven years, a great deal of uncertainty and a great deal of blight. We have had problems of inadequate compensation and lack of information. Only 10 days ago, a couple who own a public house in my constituency learned for the first time that a major part of it would be required for the scheme, yet they are supposed to petition within the next two to three weeks. That sort of thing really must not happen. We have had seven far from satisfactory years. In giving the Bill a fair wind, I hope that we can do much better in the next seven years.

7.6 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I welcome the support that has been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House so far in the debate for good environmental safeguards and for the international station at Stratford. On the latter subject, I welcome the heartening tone of the Minister's intervention during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I begin by making some remarks about the case for an international station at Stratford.

Hon. Members may well be aware of the series run by the *Evening Standard* last week which drew attention to the scale of the problems of urban deprivation in east London. The article focused on Tower Hamlets and painted a powerful picture. My borough, Newham, adjoins Tower Hamlets. According to the Government's analysis of the 1991 census, the level of urban deprivation in Newham is greater even than that in Tower Hamlets. The scale of the problem across east London is beyond doubt.

In the Bill we have the opportunity to implement the single measure which could make the biggest contribution in a hundred years to tackling that deprivation. We could make provision for the international station at Stratford. The local authorities in Tower Hamlets and Newham are making impressive strides in tackling the deprivation that they face. They are doing so in partnership with the Government and other agencies. They stand together in saying to the Government that they need a firm Government commitment in the Bill to the international station at Stratford. Everyone responsible for advising on the future of London, including the Confederation of British Industry, London First, the London Planning Advisory Committee and the local authority associations agrees. We are deliberating today on a route through east London to secure regeneration in east London. That is the reason that the Government gave for choosing the route.

On 14 October 1991 in a statement to the House to which my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has referred, the then Secretary of State for Transport said:

"our decision means that the line will be built through east London, where the prospect is welcomed for the economic regeneration it will bring."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 26.]

He said later:

"It is envisaged that the high-speed train from the channel tunnel to King's Cross will stop at Stratford".—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol.196, c.34.]

That was in 1991. That was the entire reason for choosing the easterly route. It is strange, therefore, that we continue to find it necessary to argue, as we did in the Consolidation Fund Bill debate just before Christmas on the initiative of the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for the green light for Stratford. Without it, the whole purpose of the Government in choosing the easterly route will have been thrown away.

We need Stratford international to be treated in the Bill in the same way as the intermediate station at Ebbsfleet. The Bill provides all the powers needed for a station to be built at Ebbsfleet. It does not rule out Stratford, as the Minister said, but, by contrast with Ebbsfleet, a station at Stratford probably would require additional legislation; it would certainly require additional work.

The Bill needs to be amended to ensure that there is a level playing field for the two station options, with the powers for Stratford in the Bill as well, and I hope that the Select Committee will make that change. I welcome the Minister's suggestion that there could be an amendment to the Bill, and I hope very much that the Select Committee will make it.

There has been a good deal of discussion, some of which has been aired in the debate, about the manner in which the decision in favour of Ebbsfleet was reached, and I know that the Nolan committee is inquiring into that. I do not want to comment on it at this stage. Obviously, there is a case for a station at Ebbsfleet on the M25, and I have no problem with that as long as it is treated even-handedly in relation to the east London station.

However, let us be sure about this. Not only would a station at Ebbsfleet alone in no way constitute the regeneration in east London to which the Secretary of State committed the Government, but development at Ebbsfleet alone would grievously undermine the regeneration of east London to which the Government have committed themselves.

I emphasise that important argument. It was expressed with great force and clarity by the London Planning Advisory Committee, which is the statutory organisation representing all the London boroughs and the City, which, in its 1994 "Advice on Strategic Planning Guidance for London" and in other reports on that issue in the past year or so, has made the following points:

"the provision of an international station at Stratford, with the necessary public sector support, is seen by LPAC as a pre-requisite to securing regeneration in East London.

If Ebbsfleet were the only international station to be provided, serious detriment to the cause of regeneration in East London would result. . . . business and investors would be attracted out of London to where access to the European railway exists. This would reinforce the spiral of decline in the inner part of the metropolis."

So, if the Government's commitment to a station at Stratford were to be abandoned, not only would there be none of the regeneration that the Government promised, but there would be a sucking away of investment that might have been attracted to east London, but which would instead relocate to the M25 and the green-field sites there. The development would leapfrog east London, wrecking the prospects for the economic regeneration that the line was supposed to achieve in east London and giving another boost to the downward spiral that the *Evening Standard* graphically described last week. I think that we can avoid it. We must avoid it, and that is what the Committee must ensure that we avoid.

In March last year, the Government issued planning policy guidance note 13, which discusses transport. Paragraph 1.8 advises that planning and land use policies should

"promote development within urban areas, at locations highly accessible by means other than the private car".

They should also

"locate major generators of travel demand in existing centres which are highly accessible by means other than the private car."

That is the Government's policy and it is clear. Urban regeneration or brown-field development should be promoted at the expense of out-of-town development. Developments should be encouraged in locations with good public transport access, not merely good car access. Government policy, in other words, points unequivocally to Stratford. All that we ask is that the Bill should reflect the Government's policies on regeneration. It needs to be amended to do that.

Even without the regeneration considerations, there is an overwhelming case for the Stratford station. At peak times, 15 trains per hour will run on the high-speed rail link. That is five international trains and 10 domestic commuter trains. If all those passengers can get out only at St. Pancras, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, there will be a 50 per cent. increase in the number of passengers using the underground at King's Cross. That could be managed only with an enormous investment in the underground network, which, I suggest, is not at the moment on the cards.

Mr. Corbyn: Does my hon. Friend recall that, in previous debates on the old and unlamented proposal to make King's Cross the final destination of the channel tunnel trains, it was obvious that, without any commuter trains on that line, it would be impossible for the public transport network, never mind the road network round King's Cross, to cope with the extra traffic? Therefore the case was made then for an alternative London station. Does not that emphasise the importance of the Committee seriously considering the Stratford alternative?

Mr. Timms: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's argument and I think that it is essential for that reason, as for the other reasons that I have outlined.

In any case, why compel people to go all the way into St. Pancras when, in very many cases, they would be better off changing at Stratford? People going to the City would be better off, if they were travelling by public transport, changing at Stratford and using the upgraded Central line than continuing to St. Pancras and having to return along the Circle line to Liverpool Street.

The same applies to many other people. People going to Essex and East Anglia would be better off changing at Stratford. I welcome the support for the station that was expressed by hon. Members representing constituencies in Essex. With the construction of the M11 link through east London and its spur to Stratford, there will be excellent motorway access directly to the Stratford station.

This morning, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), I visited the site of the proposed royal docks exhibition centre. Under the Government's private finance initiative, the competition to implement that project has been won by the London International Exhibition Centre Ltd. We visited the site with officers from that company, and they explained the scheme that they envisage, to go on site, they hope, this year. They propose an exhibition centre that, in phase 1, will be bigger than Olympia and ultimately will be as large as Earls Court and Olympia put together. It is a very important project for London, which I welcome.

The officers of the company emphasised to us the importance for the success of their project of siting the international station at Stratford. What is true for that project is true, on the larger plane, for docklands and for east London as a whole. We are not asking for subsidy, because the Stratford Promoter Group, which is an excellent example of the type of partnership that the Government advocate, has shown that the station will pay for itself. We are asking, however, for the Government's commitment and for an unambiguous green light. That is the way to secure the benefit for the area of the investment that the Government have already made.

The location of the station at Stratford is the key issue in the Bill for the long-term future of east London, but there are many other issues of importance to us in the Bill too. The line will run in a tunnel under my constituency and under the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). Two vent shafts will be constructed in Newham and Union Railways tells us that in Newham, between Stratford and Woodgrange Park, approximately 350 properties will be affected by perceptible vibration once the tunnel is operating, and 390 by ground-borne noise and perceptible vibration as well.

The Bill needs to ensure that the best engineering methods are used in constructing the tunnel, to minimise and cushion those problems, instead of the cheapest methods. The environmental statement prepared for Union Railways says that ground-borne noise could be mitigated by an amended tunnel design and amended track form design. I hope that those aspects will be carefully considered by the Select Committee. We need safeguards to control the noise levels from the construction sites—

[Mr. Timms]

the major site at Stratford and the construction sites for the vent shafts. We need to be satisfied that the tunnelling method adopted will minimise the risk of subsidence affecting the homes above the tunnel.

Another issue that I hope will be discussed is access for people with disabilities who want to use the channel tunnel trains. The rail link should be an accessible railway and the legislation should contain provisions to ensure that it is. That should be taken for granted for a new railway being built in the late 1990s, and I hope that it will be the case with this one.

Undoubtedly, the channel tunnel rail link will create serious nuisances for residents in Newham. One of those affected will be my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West, who lives directly above the line of the tunnel, but he takes the view that we all take—a constituent said it to me again on the telephone last night—that we shall take the grief if, as part of the package, we secure the regeneration benefits that the Government have promised through an international station at Stratford. It is a matter of good faith and commercial good sense. We look to the Government to put their policies in that area into practice.

7.19 pm

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): In introducing the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that the project was of major significance to the people of Britain. All hon. Members in the Chamber this afternoon have concurred with that view.

The people of Kent well understand the need for a link, inconvenient though it may be in some cases. We have willed the completion, with the help of private enterprise, of the channel tunnel and we must will a link to it. But in building the first main line railway for more than 100 years, we must make absolutely certain that we maintain, as far as possible, the living environment of the people of Kent.

I speak today for the concerns of my constituents who are affected. All my constituents want an improvement in commuter services. Those who live in the Medway towns and on the Kent coast have suffered badly for years. British Rail has, almost unashamedly, admitted that the two worst lines in the whole of Network SouthEast are the line out to the Medway towns and the line to Southend. So a large proportion of my constituents want an improvement in the domestic service.

The Department of Transport investigated a widening of the M2 between junctions 1 and 4. I am bound to say that it was not done totally in secret because it was known to anybody who wanted to purchase a house through searches carried out by solicitors, but it was still veiled in such a mist that Kent's highways authority and Rochester city council had to ask me whether I could find out what the Department of Transport was doing in respect of the M2 widening. Coincidentally with the rail link issue, we discovered that it had ascertained that the current Medway M2 motorway bridge was not strong enough to take extra lanes.

Thus my constituents are confronted with the need to build another road bridge over the Medway at that point plus a rail link bridge. They defy anyone else to show them where there are three bridges in conjunction, all three as high as the viaduct in the constituency of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

My constituents are not satisfied that real consideration has been given to building a tunnel under the Medway. A tunnel is already being built under the Medway between my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) to take traffic out of the Medway towns. My constituents suggested the solution of a tunnel, but do not believe that the Department had a good reason for not building another tunnel under the Medway.

Nor do they believe that the Department seriously considered their suggestion, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) proposed, of a combined road and rail bridge across the Medway. After all, as my hon. Friend pointed out, such a bridge operates in Newcastle, so we did not see why it could not be considered to avoid the three-bridge solution.

That is the first matter about which my constituents are concerned. The second, concerning noise pollution, is by far the most important. Noise on the existing Medway motorway bridge has increased considerably over the years. Just over a year ago, it was resurfaced and my constituents specifically asked whether the resurfacing could be done in a material that would minimise the noise. They were assured that that would be done, but less than a year later they tell me that the noise has definitely increased. I suppose that that may be due to an increase in traffic, which was a good reason why the Department wanted to provide extra lanes. But my constituents do not feel adequately reassured on the question of noise protection and noise pollution. They do not believe that enough scientific evidence is available to ascertain the waves of noise pollution that would emanate from such an elevated bridge to the people who live almost underneath.

In the petitions which the Select Committee will carefully consider, my constituents have insisted on the state of the art in building to minimise noise and on the most up-to-date and proven protection against noise pollution. Given that the bridge will last for more than 100 years, the least we can do is use the most up-to-date systems of protection against pollution.

My constituents also seek assurances that the problem will be constantly monitored. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent referred to that matter. Although noise protection has already been put in hand in respect of a train travelling at 140 to 150 mph, if trains are expected to run at a higher speed, what is the use of installing noise protection for the lesser speed?

My constituents' third concern is about the construction of the link, which is why we asked for a simultaneous presentation of this issue in a single Bill. We did not want the people who live in the vicinity of those three bridges to have to sustain a programme of work for one Bill which was then followed by a programme for another. We want the maximum noise protection and we want it to be sequential so that it is completed in one period, not two.

Although Boxley long tunnel is not in my constituency, I share the wish of the county of Kent and the other districts that the Select Committee should consider the matter. Given the Government's assurances, I expect no less from the Select Committee than that it will carefully consider all the petitions placed before it. I do not see why I should ask the Minister to instruct the Committee to do so because a Select Committee of the House is set

up to ensure not only that justice is done but that it is absolutely seen to be done. It will be done only if the Committee has a free mind to consider the petitions placed before it.

I support my constituents' concern about that and trust the Select Committee to consider any petitions on the long tunnel. From the point of view of my constituents and the city council, the matter is exceedingly important, because we should not prejudice the openness of the Medway gap. A conurbation that included Maidstone and the Medway towns would be a city to challenge the metropolis not far away.

I refer to compensation, on which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has concentrated and built up considerable expertise. Rumour has it that the French pay more compensation, more humanely and more realistically than we do. I know that they have more land, which gives them greater scope to permit things, but a few years ago the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors produced a considerable document on the need to revise the compensation system in this country. In the first new major railway line this century, compensation of a fair amount and a fair acceptance of blight is essential to ensure justice to those on the route.

In my constituency is an area called the Nashenden valley. Residents there have the widened M2 on one side and the rail link on the other. There they are in a pocket in the middle. I demand that they get some realistic assessment of what the two projects mean to the 13 or so households in that valley.

There are many details—I will not go through all the details that worry my constituents—but I have highlighted the greatest of them. I rely on the Select Committee to listen carefully to all the petitions. I hope very much that it will follow the wise precedence of earlier Select Committees, which chose to hold some of their meetings in the areas in which the problems are occurring.

7.30 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): Even the most sceptical of the Euro-sceptics must, I believe, support the construction of a rail link through Britain to enable us to take proper advantage of the opportunities that the opening of the channel tunnel and the development of the Community offer.

The Government have shown the same incompetence on this issue as they have on so many others. As other hon. Members have said, this debate should have taken place six or seven years ago; the rail link should have been up and running in time for the opening of the tunnel before Christmas. Now, when the Government have finally come to the House with a Bill, their proposals in relation to my constituents are damaging and unacceptable.

My constituents support the construction of a rail link in Britain. They are not adopting a NIMBY-like attitude to progress. But equally, it is neither fair nor just that they should be expected to tolerate the unnecessary destruction to their lives and homes that the current proposals entail. All hon. Members who have been most closely connected with the development of the current proposals, including the Minister for Transport in London, now recognise that the citizens of Barking will get an unacceptably raw deal if the Bill and the route are enacted as they stand.

In Barking, there are not 13 families affected, as in Medway. Some 5,000 people live within a quarter of a mile of the rail link, so more people in Barking will suffer more than anywhere else along the whole route.

The proposed route goes through the centre of Barking, tears the heart out of my constituency and destroys a close and stable community. Thousands of families are affected. There is an absurd inconsistency between the Government's proposals for the channel tunnel rail link and their expressed wish to see regeneration in that part of London. How can one regenerate an area when, at the same time, one blights thousands of homes and ruins the lives of thousands of families? There is not one hon. Member in the Chamber who would not be utterly horrified if such proposals threatened to affect their own homes. None of us would tolerate it, and the Minister responsible knows that I am right.

Union Railways, in looking at the impact of atmospheric pollution during construction, estimated that 1,990 properties in Barking would be affected by such pollution. I believe that even more homes are blighted.

Let me explain to hon. Members the impact that the proposals will have on Barking, on its people—not on trees, not on toads, but on its people. Some 321 homes open directly on to the railway, but many more will be hit by the proposals. They are not large homes with extensive gardens. Rather, they are modest homes for young couples on the first rung of the ladder of owner-occupation. They are homes for elderly couples who want to see out their retirement in peace and quiet. They are homes for council tenants who cannot choose to move.

The Minister for Railways and Roads has been with me to the homes—homes in which the distance from the kitchen window to the rail track is a mere 2.5 m. That is less than the distance between myself and the Minister who sits opposite me today. At present, three trains go past every hour; very few use the line in the late evenings and at weekends. The trains travel at less than 50 mph.

When the CTRL is completed, there could be one train every three minutes, at 185 mph, with more at weekends. That is without having regard to the likely increase in the use of the line for freight, to which other hon. Members have referred. That could increase threefold in the first 10 years of operation.

Just imagine eating one's tea while trains go by 10 ft from one's window every three minutes at 185 mph. Just imagine putting one's baby to sleep while those trains are going by at the bottom of one's short garden. Just imagine letting one's children play in the garden in those circumstances. Just imagine if one is old and poorly and trying to get some rest. How can a competent Government seriously propose such a scheme? Current noise impact studies compare existing midweek noise with future midweek noise, ignoring the expected increase in weekend traffic on a line that is scarcely used at weekends.

No owner-occupiers living near the CTRL route can sell their homes. For them, the Conservative dream of owner-occupation has become a personal nightmare. About half those affected by the proposals are owner-occupiers. At the height of the housing market, their homes sold for £85,000. Today, no building society will lend on any property in the area. The only sales are to unscrupulous landlords offering a mere £20,000 to £25,000 to home owners, for whom their house is their only form of savings.

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

I have a cabinet full of cases from constituents needing to move, who are trapped and forgotten. They include an elderly couple whose 43-year-old son has learning difficulties and needs constant care—they want to move closer to their other son in New Zealand before they die, so that he can care for his brother with learning difficulties, in the community. A widow has become mentally ill because she cannot move closer to her daughter. A man has impaired hearing and could not live with more and noisier trains. A woman needs to sell the empty house that she inherited from her mother, to pay for her daughter's higher education. I could go on.

The scandal is that, under the current rules set by the Department of Transport, Union Railways is offering to purchase only eight properties along that part of the route—eight out of 2,000-plus. The truth is that the Government got their fingers burned with early acquisitions along the Kent stretch of the route, so they amended the regulations, and my constituents are being forced to pay the price.

I have held meetings with the Minister for Railways and Roads, and he has said that he considers the current proposals on compensation inadequate. In my view, they are grossly inadequate and completely unacceptable, but he has not come back to me since the end of November with any sensible alternative proposals, and none is suggested in the Bill. I again ask that both the Minister and the Select Committee look for a new and more realistic compensation package, along the terms suggested by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley).

Building the CTRL is not like building a new road. The homes are blighted until construction starts; then there will be at least five years of construction. We all know, from the experience of the tunnel itself, that we could be talking about seven or eight years of construction.

Obtaining information from Union Railways is as difficult as getting the Home Secretary to admit responsibility for anything that happens in the Prison Service, but I understand that its plans for my constituency involve one major construction site, 12 secondary sites, two railheads and a potential spoil disposal site. That will cause immense noise, disturbance, pollution, congestion and danger.

Union Railways itself predicts that 300 lorries will come in and out every day. Those lorries will rumble past hundreds of front doors, past a primary school and past the homes of shift workers who are used to a quiet residential street—and not just during the day. Imagine living with that for five, six or seven years—it simply is not on. The local council has been told that it will be consulted on the construction code of practice only if it has signed a planning agreement with the Government, which could fetter the council's discretion as a local planning authority; that too is absurd, and I ask the Select Committee to examine the matter.

When I spoke about the impact of the proposals on my constituents in an Adjournment debate on 21 July, I asked the Minister to consider widening the limits of deviation for the route so that a practical solution for the problem in Barking could be found. He chose not to accede to my request; again, I urge the Select Committee to consider the matter. I still believe that it would be feasible to re-route the CTRL either across or under Barking reach, and that that would be the best solution for all concerned. It was what Ove Arup originally proposed, and it would work for both the people of Barking and the promoters of the link.

We are building a line that we want to last not for a mere 10 years, but for a long hundred years. Getting it right for the communities of tomorrow is our responsibility; bulldozing a route through people's homes and destroying their lives represents a scandalous dereliction of duty.

In the light of the current proposals, I urge the House to give unanimous support to the instruction that has been drafted for the Select Committee. The people of Barking must be treated in the same way as everyone else along the route, including the people of Kent.

Not one of my constituents has chosen to argue against the development of a CTRL; not one has tried to argue that the route should not go through part of Barking. They know how important the development is for Britain as a whole. What they and I will not accept, however, is a short-term quick fix that ignores their legitimate demands that—both during the construction period and when the route is completed—they should enjoy the same protection as others, and appropriate compensation for disturbance and loss.

The people of Barking feel that, during the past few years since the proposals were first developed, they have become the forgotten people. Since I became their representative, I have tried to promote their cause. It is now up to the House to instruct the Select Committee to do all it can to protect the people of Barking.

7.43 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Although the Channel tunnel rail link does not pass through my constituency, it should benefit my many thousands of commuter constituents, and the major improvement works to the A2 and M2 from junctions 1 to 4 should help to ease the congested stretch of two-lane motorway from Three Crutches to the turn-off to Gillingham.

This morning, I re-read the *Official Report*'s record of the announcement, in a statement to the House on 20 January 1986, of the Government's decision to accept the Channel Tunnel Group's bid to build the tunnel, the debate on 10 February of that year on the White Paper, and the Second Reading debate on what became the Channel Tunnel Act 1987. There was much praise, from hon. Members on both sides of the House, for the Government's initiative in promoting this great civil engineering project—not least because of the impetus that it would give to the railway network, and particularly the opportunity that would be afforded to the transfer of long-distance freight from road to rail.

There was, however, little mention of a high-speed dedicated rail link from the channel to London or beyond. In answer to a question from the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) about his statement, the then Secretary of State for Transport, Nicholas Ridley, said:

"It is not planned to increase the standard of the track that runs from Folkestone to London to enable it to take very high-speed trains. Such work would cause major disruption and would inflict immense damage on the environment. We have made it clear that that will not happen."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 32.]

During one of the debates, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed)—I am sorry that he is not present now—reminded the House that the 1974 Channel tunnel project, cancelled by Labour in 1975, had involved a high-speed rail link, but said that he hoped that such notions had been buried with the 1974 tunnel.

I regret that the Government and Parliament did not decide to build the rail link with the tunnel, as an integrated project. I have always been an enthusiastic supporter of the Channel tunnel, viewing it as a major artery for the United Kingdom to exploit the potential market in Europe in a way that has always been constrained by the 22 miles of the English channel; however, the scheme approved by the House in 1986 was clearly flawed in not including a rail link, and also, in my opinion, by section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, which stipulated that no Government grant or subsidy could be paid for international rail passenger services. That section was a sop to my Europhobe colleagues who wanted to ensure, if possible, that the tunnel project would founder and we could return to our little Englander isolation.

It was obvious from the outset that the success of the project would be greatly enhanced by a high-speed rail link at least from the coast to London, and early in 1988, British Rail began—in an unbelievably ham-fisted way—to plan for such a grande vitesse rail link. The past seven years have seen a tortuous progress from the kitchen-table plans, mentioned earlier, that blighted wide swathes of Kent, to today's substantially planned route and project, presented publicly by Union Railways last autumn.

During even the worst days of British Rail's mishandling of the project—the first major new rail route in Britain for a century, as hon. Members have reminded us—no one proposed a route that went through, over or under Gillingham. My constituents were therefore not subjected to the agonies of planning blight that afflicted many of my hon. Friends whose constituencies lay on the various proposed routes. Thus, at the many meetings of Kent Members with successive Secretaries of State for Transport—and there have been a good many—I have been able to support the fast link without fear of upsetting my constituents, and to use the occasion to urge my various right hon. Friends to maximise the new line's potential to improve conditions for commuters who live in Gillingham and currently endure appalling conditions on the north Kent line of British Rail's Network SouthEast.

The Bill includes

"the outline of an intermediate station at Ebbsfleet"

and, more importantly, connections with other existing lines. There is a prospect that the new line proposed in the Bill will indeed offer commuters from north Kent an opportunity, at a premium, to speed up their journeys: daylight, perhaps, at the end of a very long tunnel.

We should be able to greet that news with unequivocal pleasure, but in the past few days a cloud has appeared, in the form of a letter from British Rail to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport, saying that BR sees no commercial case for ordering the next tranche of Networker trains for the Kent coastlines before 1999.

I understand that the present ramshackle rolling stock on the Kent coast line through my constituency at Rainham will not be able to function on the new high-speed line, so the mirage of a speeded-up journey for my commuters—and beyond—again disappears into the distant future. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister would care to comment on that undesirable news when he winds up the debate.

The Bill is not simply to enable a much-needed railway line to be built. For reasons which my right hon. Friend feels are good and substantial, this already complex Bill includes in part II clauses 39 to 42 which allow the widening of the A2 at Cobham and the M2 between junctions 1 and 4. My constituents are most directly affected by that part of the Bill.

During the debate in February 1986 on the channel tunnel White Paper, I predicted that the tunnel would make the M2 too busy for it to remain a local bypass around the Medway towns. I pleaded with the then Secretary of State, Nicholas Ridley, to expedite the northern relief road for the Medway towns and a new Medway tunnel. As my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) has said, this important local bypass is now being constructed. However, congestion on the M2, even though the A20-M20 is now signposted as the main route to the tunnel, justifies widening the westernmost miles of that underbuilt road.

I regret that it is in connection with part II that my local authority, Gillingham borough council, proposes to petition against the Bill on the narrow issue of arrangements for junction 4 of the M2 in my constituency. It will do so because the council believes that the current scheme proposes to place traffic lights only on the elevated roundabout at junction 4, the Gillingham turn-off. The Highways Agency has already stated that that arrangement will not cater for high traffic growth for the design life of the scheme. The council considers that junction 4 should be properly modified as part of a scheme to cater for the predicted traffic flows.

There will be enormous disruption to the M2 between junctions 3 and 4 as a result of the widening works, and an alternative route must be provided. Such a route, the Medway towns southern peripheral route, could be completed, and would provide a suitable link between junctions 3 and 4. That should be funded through the Bill.

The volume of traffic using the motorway could be reduced by transferring people from private cars to coaches. There is already substantial coach traffic from the Medway towns to London each day, and that could be enhanced if a proper coach park for commuters could be provided at junction 4.

My council is also worried that the Bill does not include provision for the local planning authorities to control matters relating to the detailed design and management of the motorway project. That involves matters such as minor construction works, lighting, accesses, spoil disposal, landscaping, screening, hours of working and noise suppression. The Bill includes provision for those things for the rail link, and the council considers that the Secretary of State should enter into agreements with local planning authorities for the motorway work as well.

Although the Select Committee may feel that my council's petition will be out of order, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give due consideration to the council's valid points.

I have been convinced since 1986 of the need for a fast link. The benefits to my commuter constituents of an express route to London merely confirm my conviction, but the real clincher for me was my journey to Brussels

[Mr. James Couchman]

on 10 November as the guest, along with many other hon. Members, of European Passenger Services on the Eurostar. The splendid Eurostar train took longer to complete the journey between my local station in Bromley from Waterloo than had the slow commuter train that I had caught in the opposite direction two hours earlier.

We had plenty of time to admire the Kent scenery as we dawdled across the Weald, and it was only when we reached the tunnel that the train began to achieve a speed that suggested some urgency to our journey. The first section between the French portal and Lille served to emphasise the slowness of the English and Belgian sections of the journey.

I look forward to a two-and-half-hour journey to Paris. Not only the ferries will be unable to compete with that: the miserable air journey between Heathrow and Charles de Gaulle will also become a thing of the past. I am delighted to support the Bill, and I hope that the Minister will be able to assuage my local council's fears about junction 4.

7.53 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I begin by declaring not one but two interests. First, I am the only Member to be sponsored by the rail drivers' union ASLEF. Secondly, I am one of two Members whose constituencies are within the borough boundaries of the London borough of Camden where the terminal of the channel tunnel rail link, St. Pancras, is to be found. I do not intend to speak for the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). He is more than capable of doing that himself.

I am anxious to speak because for many years that terminal will be a massive building site which will undoubtedly have a knock-on effect on my constituents. In common with hon. Members of all parties, my constituents and I welcome the idea of a high-speed railway. Any railway which helps to push this country and its transport system into the 21st century is welcome. Also in common with my constituents, however, I am concerned about the environmental impact of the proposals and the possibility that petitions from areas which the Government may not deem at this stage to be affected by the proposals for the building of the line will not necessarily be accepted by the Select Committee. I hope that the Minister will deal with that matter.

Some of the proposals affecting St. Pancras deal not only with the construction of major new lines and connections to a line which certainly affects my constituents—the north London line, where four separate lines need to be built—but with new roads which will have major works beneath them such as sewers and piping and works of that nature. My constituents and I agree with the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) that environmental protection should be the most modern available.

The Minister spoke of the environmental considerations which apply now, but we are learning from day to day and from month to month of more and more possible environmental dangers. One hopes that at the same time we shall learn of measures to ameliorate those environmental dangers and hazards. The project is extremely long-term, and I ask the Minister to consider and advise the Committee that changes within the plan may be considered on grounds of increased environmental knowledge in the many years ahead.

In a telling contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) asked the House to imagine what it would be like for her constituents to have a railway line at the bottom of their gardens at a distance somewhat less than that between the Front Benches. There is no need to ask hon. Members to imagine what it will be like for my constituents who will have to live in close proximity to a major building site, because Members fortunate enough to have offices in the Norman Shaw North building know precisely what that is like. The building site there has been occasioned by the work that is under way, seemingly for the foreseeable future, on Westminster bridge and on the Jubilee line extension at Westminster underground station.

Little or no protection was offered to hon. Members and their staff who work in the Norman Shaw buildings during the destruction which had to take place before construction could be undertaken, although the fascias of Government buildings in Whitehall were protected by sheets of blue plastic. I doubt whether the dust and debris, which I know from personal experience sift into my office every day and cover every piece of equipment, sift into Government offices. If there is to be a double standard as to what constitutes environmental protection, it should be weighted towards the people who have to live around, for example, the St. Pancras terminus and its concomitant areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barking spoke of 300 lorries trundling through residential streets. That will inevitably happen in my constituency and my constituents will suffer from that sort of pollution. The members of the Committee should also consider whether there should be published, well in advance so that there can be genuine consultation, details of the possible implications of approach to the site of equipment. That would give information on equipment and the type of heavy duty machinery that would be required. Overridingly, there should be strict guidelines as to the hours at which such materials and machinery can work and on the kind of light that will be necessary to facilitate the work without causing danger to those engaged in the work or to people who live in the areas.

I know that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so I will conclude my remarks. In a sense, I shall end where I began. My constituents and I would welcome anything that provides the nation as a whole with a transport system which fits us and our economic requirements for the 21st century. As the link will be a national resource, however, the nation as a whole should carry a fair proportion of the burden.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have spoken about levels of compensation for those who will lose their homes. I would argue that during the period when the line is being constructed there should also be compensation for people who will have their environment distorted by noise, pollution and the other factors that I have mentioned.

A leader in today's *Manchester Guardian* — *[Interruption.]* That gives Conservative Members an idea of how long I have been reading newspapers. I am, of course, referring to *The Guardian*, in which a leading article today said, in effect, that 80 per cent. of the costs of the link are being met by the taxpayer, yet the lease is being sold for 999 years. One Conservative Member

earlier suggested that British Rail should increase its contribution towards compensation; I believe that the private firms which eventually win the contracts to build the line should also be asked to make a sizeable contribution to compensation. The link is a national resource, so it should not be just one section of the nation that has to pay not only in cash but in kind.

8.1 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): This debate is a milestone in the six-year-old drama of the rail link, which has afflicted Kent since 1988. Over those six years, engineers and enthusiasts have drawn lines across my Kentish constituency affecting almost every square mile, to the detriment and anguish of residents. The drama first hit the village of Istead Rise and the parishes of Meopham and Luddesdown in 1988, with the farce of a British Rail manager telling anxious residents in Istead Rise that he had used his children's crayons and his wife's greaseproof paper to draw up the map of routes. New routes have swung from north to south since then, ending up with the route before the House today. Some 11 miles of it passes through my constituency, which is 17 per cent. of the entire link.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made great play of the delays that have ensued. Of course the decision could have been made immediately if the people of Kent had been literally bulldozed aside and taxpayers' money wasted in vast quantities. I preferred the matter to be investigated thoroughly to ensure that we got it right. There has been no rush. Who needed the rail link anyway? Where would the cost benefit have been? Eurostar and tunnel freight are operating well now and passenger traffic would gain only 20 minutes in any event. The key is the rail capacity across Kent. It is adequate now for local and international needs, but on forecast growth it would reach saturation point early in the next century. A new rail line would then be inevitable, so it may as well be designed for high-speed operation—and that is what we are debating today.

Some say that the Government have delayed too long and have paid too much attention to residents' concerns. A certain Opposition right hon. Member is alleged to have complained about "those pampered Kentish whingers" and unfavourably compared British progress with the French HGV route construction, but we should not compare the vast empty landscape of northern France with the rolling, beautiful, populated countryside of Kent. That is why environmental protection must be high on the House's agenda in considering the Bill.

We must ensure that guarantees are built into the Bill to require its promoters to honour undertakings already given by Union Railways and to prohibit any backsliding. If the impact of the rail link on my constituents were confined to environmental damage, I would vote against the Bill today. However, my constituency also stands to gain a great deal from the decision to locate the intermediate international and domestic station within the constituency at Ebbsfleet. That totally tilts the balance in favour of the link and I shall therefore support the Bill today. Nevertheless, I look forward to the Select and Standing Committees going into the details very thoroughly indeed.

The Ebbsfleet international and domestic station is essential. The Government's decision to approve the station was wise, of great value to international travellers and of great importance to local commuters and passengers. Located within a few miles of the M25, it is ideally located for international travellers from the south-east, East Anglia and, indeed, east London. Plenty of parking will be available. For my constituents it will mean only 20 minutes commuting to London instead of the current 50 minutes. It will act as a catalyst for new developments on the exhausted chalk workings, which will bring thousands of new jobs. It will bring new relief roads and improve house prices.

I must say that I resent the gutter campaign by Opposition Members—understandably talking up Stratford, which is anyway provided for in the Bill—with their allegations of sleaze and the talk and cartoons of "Fartyswamp". That cartoon in *The Guardian*—so close to the heart of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson)—is the sort of abuse that my constituents have had to put up with and which was further exemplified today by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). The Ebbsfleet decision was the culmination of an excellent campaign by local Members of Parliament, business men and councils. Furthermore, it was the right decision.

However, conditions must be put on station development. We must be assured that, even before work starts on the link or the station, the Northfleet town bypass, known as the south Thamesside development phase 4, will be constructed. Designed for dual carriageway, at least one carriageway must be functional as soon as possible. The west end of the phase 4 road must link up with Stonebridge road, thus bypassing Northfleet town. It is essential not only to bring relief to Northfleet but to provide from the outset for construction traffic to be kept well out of residential areas. I very much regret the fact that Kent county council gave the project such a low priority that it will not be constructed during this coming year. Nevertheless, the council should make haste in designing the bypass and submitting it to public consultation.

Another of my concerns is the Ebbsfleet water course, its environment and wildlife habitats—part of which is a designated site of special scientific interest—and the footpaths throughout that area. We also have the unique Blue lake in the Ebbsfleet valley. In this modern age of environmental expertise, all those issues should be examined. In particular, I commend to the Committee a paper prepared by the Northfleet action group which highlights the issues.

The Ebbsfleet valley was the site of an ancient Roman settlement, and the competent archaeological authorities must give their clearance before work starts. The valley also houses the valuable Blue Circle sports facilities. Blue Circle industries, as the landowner and developer, has much to gain from the development and must give a commitment to replace those facilities in the immediate area for the benefit of local residents.

The Ebbsfleet valley will also be the location for the connection to British Rail's north Kent line. That is very valuable and will allow appropriate passenger trains from the Medway towns, Higham and Gravesend to access the high-speed link to London. However, the environmental impact of the embankment of the connecting line must be reassessed.

There are also plans for a light railway, to be known as Union Metro, which will use the north Kent line onwards through south-east London and then cross the Thames to

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

connect with docklands. That project needs favourable consideration in the context of the development of the Thames gateway—the new title for the east Thames corridor.

The House will recall the battle of Pepper hill, which attracted its own debate in the House. My right hon. Friends the Members for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) and for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), when Ministers at the Department of Transport, took the momentous and, I believe, courageous decision to re-route the link out from under some 300 houses at Pepper hill and to force Union Railways to design an alternative route in cuttings past that location and in a tunnel under the A2 motor road. I should like to be assured that that crossing will be by bored tunnel at a low level, which would further minimise the impact on the residential area of southern Northfleet. It would also have the advantage of eliminating the disruption of heavy traffic on the A2 which progressive cut-and-cover construction methods would cause.

I pay tribute to the hard work of the A2 rail action group, led by Mrs. Celia Jones. I should also draw the Committee's attention to the continuing concern of local residents. The deep cuttings near New Barn road should be covered over, which would protect the residents perched above at Pepper hill. The land sandwiched between the A2 motor road and the rail link opposite urban Northfleet and Gravesend should be either returned to agriculture or set to woodlands. In no circumstances should there be any construction development which would breach the long-standing defence of the metropolitan green belt. To protect local residents, commitments should be extracted from the promoters about the landscaping to be put in place. That should no doubt include consideration of lowering the running level at that point.

I turn to one of the remaining contentious points which should be rethought—the crossing of the A227 Wrotham road at the Tollgate. Current plans for a viaduct over the valley known as Northumberland Bottom have led to fears of noise reverberation towards Istead Rise and northwards to a residential district overlooking the Tollgate. I have read no convincing presentation which calms the fears of local residents. I hope very much that Gravesham borough council will petition on that point and will commend to the Select Committee the professional presentation made by the Istead Rise rail action group, whose voluntary work over the years has been invaluable. In particular, the group highlights the possibilities for passing under the A227 carriageway. We also require assurances about any construction sites at that point.

Concern about the rail link remains high in the village. An opinion survey carried out last month in Istead Rise brought a 74 per cent. response from residents to a detailed questionnaire. Seventy-two per cent. of those respondents remain opposed to the rail link and 82 per cent. are very concerned about the proposed multi-span bridge, with a further 14 per cent. moderately concerned about it.

The impact of the landscaping and elevation requirements of the passing loops at Singlewell remain a concern. The passing loops are allegedly required for freight operation, allowing high-speed trains to pass. I do not understand the need for freight on that line, and a number of hon. Members have said the same in the course of the debate. The existing routes can more than adequately handle freight, especially for destinations in the midlands and northwards, which can skirt London to the south. I do not understand why the peace and quiet of south Kent should be bought at the expense of my constituents.

I should like the Committee to consider whether freight working is necessary. I reject the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who supports the building of the passing loops at Singlewell. Incidentally, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, also wants those passing loops to be inflicted on my constituents. Alternative consideration should be given to whether the track facilities at Ebbsfleet make the earlier plans for Singlewell passing loops obsolete. The Committee should therefore consider scrapping freight loops, with consequent opportunities for environmental improvements and improved landscaping.

Perhaps the impact of most national significance is that proposed for Ashenbank wood and Cobham park. Ashenbank is real, ancient woodland. It is of significance for wildlife habitat and a site of special scientific interest. Cobham park and its ponds alongside the route are a fine example of a Repton landscape that would be damaged by the link. The current proposal provides for a wedge to be driven through the woodlands and for a railway to be driven along the edge of Cobham park. The devastation would be considerable.

A whole range of respected environmental organisations have expressed their dismay. I mention but a few: the Woodland Trust, the National Trust, the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Many of those organisations will be petitioning. It is my regret that Kent county council is not petitioning on that point. I therefore strongly commend the petitions of those environmental and heritage organisations and also the petition of Cobham parish council, which is being made jointly with the Kent Association of Parish Councils.

Engineering consultants Travers Morgan have carried out a study of the engineering viability of a tunnel beneath the wood and the sensitive parts of Cobham park, with tunnelling through the sound chalk strata. That is worth careful consideration. The cost could be financed by a specific grant from the environmental fund controlled by the environmental directorate of the European Commission. I am very disappointed and frustrated by the lack of progress in obtaining commitments from those funds by the new Member of the European Parliament for West Kent.

Mr. Dunn: He is a Labour MEP.

Mr. Arnold: Indeed he is.

Incidentally, those funds could also finance other environmental improvements along the link. I am likewise surprised that the Opposition amendment makes no mention of Ashenbank wood or the urban fringe of Northfleet and Gravesend, where there are thousands of houses, in their call for tunnelling to protect the environment. The feeble excuses for the omission offered by the hon. Member for Oldham, West will not wash with my constituents in Northfleet.

Another major point of concern for local residents is the location, scale and operation of construction sites. Those should all be immediately adjacent to the A2 motor road and access to them should not be through residential areas. Strict management should be applied.

The site for the Thames tunnel work, if it must be on the south side, should be on Botany marshes, and it should be served by a rail spur from the north Kent line and by road access from the new Northfleet bypass. Both works should be constructed in advance of the link and river tunnel.

One specific site included in the safeguarded areas is the remote Hoo junction in the parish of Higham. That is apparently required for transshipment of aggregates and construction material. I have been assured by Union Railways that no materials or aggregate will be shifted in and out by road. As such roads are tiny country lanes, that must be rigidly enforced.

Lastly, with regard to compensation arrangements I believe that the boundaries of the safeguarded zones have been drawn in a very mean spirit, narrowing significantly to exclude badly affected homes and thus avoid compensation obligations. That is particularly noticeable at Longview, Henhurst road and The Lodge, Scalers hill, where five properties, all badly affected and sandwiched between the A2 motor road and the rail link, are left in limbo. Two have been offered voluntary purchase, but without the mark-up or assistance with costs. In a project of this size, that action is mean-minded and petty and it should be corrected.

This is a major civil engineering project and clearly the House favours it, but I ask the House not to forget that it affects people—real people—and Kentish people, my constituents. I hope that during the passage of the Bill careful attention will be given to the many concerns that I have raised today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): We have one hour before the winding-up speeches. Six hon. Members wish to make speeches, so I make that 10 minutes each.

8.17 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): First, I must comment on the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who managed to prove to everyone that he could read quite well and possibly write quite well, if he wrote the speech, but if he is going to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) had been reading his speech, I should have drawn his attention to that fact.

Mr. Heppell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not for a moment suggest that you missed that, so I shall say that when the hon. Member for Gravesham is debating and not reading from written notes, he should at least ensure that events that have happened during the day are reflected in his speech. When he includes inaccuracies that have been cleared up in the debate he makes himself look foolish. He asked earlier whether it made any difference how quickly the proposal was passed as it meant a difference of only 20 minutes in journey times, but later in his speech he talked about savings of more than 20 minutes. That proves how foolish he is.

I shall support the Bill because I have a record of supporting such Bills. I supported the King's Cross (No. 2) Bill, much to the annoyance of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I did so because I am in favour of railways and all forms of public transport that take traffic off the roads. I shall support the Bill but it will be in spite of, rather than because of, the Government. One hon. Member said that the Bill was five years too late. That is quite late, even by British Rail's standards, so it is with considerable annoyance that I support the Bill.

I am angry with the Government for the delays and because the alignment of the route has been changed so many times, sometimes for what appear to be arbitrary reasons. More than anything, I am angry at the Government's insistence on bringing in the private sector. In fact, it is not an insistence on bringing in the private sector but an insistence that the public sector should not be involved.

I have been involved in plenty of local projects, such as the Greater Nottingham light rapid transit system; we wanted to bring in the private sector for the Robin Hood line. Many Labour Members want to bring about a partnership with the private sector in this case but the problem is that the Government want to involve the private sector and exclude the public sector altogether. Everyone in this country, in Europe or in the world who knows anything about railways knows that public sector involvement is required—everyone except the Government.

We could have had a real partnership in this project as was the case with the Greater Nottingham light rapid transit system. In Nottingham, there was a partnership between the city council, the county council and the private sector. We advertised for private sector partners for the Robin Hood line. All parties would welcome that in this project but we have passed up every opportunity of a real partnership with the private sector. Even when people were literally offering money, the Government said no because that money was conditional on some public sector money.

In the event, the partnership is very strange. It is like a marriage but, in some respects, it is an arranged marriage. We have to pay a dowry to enter into it and we are paying it with public assets; we are paying it with the European passenger service, a public asset built with public money. It is not being sold but given away as part of the deal. Waterloo station, which is a public asset, is also being given away. The freehold of Ashford international station is also being given away as part of what I would describe as a bizarre arrangement. We are talking about maintenance depots in London and Manchester being given away as part of the same deal. The same is true of property in Olympia, not to mention the locomotives and rolling stock that will be given away, not sold.

When the deal has been done, the Government will purchase the right to use some of the capacity on the line for domestic trains. I am not sure that this is the type of partnership that we might have expected at the beginning of the process. I put that down to the Government. However, I shall still support the Bill.

Listening to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), I realised that many people have a romantic view of the golden age of steam engines and diesel trains. I too am a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, so I must declare an interest. However, I have worked on such trains and I do not have such a romantic view of them. When one is crawling under a bogie changing brake blocks and traction engine motor bushes, frozen stiff at 1 am, covered in grease and oil, one does not get quite so romantic about the railway as the railway enthusiasts.

[Mr. Heppell]

I accept, however, that the golden age of rail will come again, because there is no alternative for the future. Increasingly, the Government are making noises to the effect that the railways and public transport systems are the future, and I want that idea developed. People must realise that we are talking not about an antiquated, romanticised idea but about a vision of how transport should be in the future.

Many hon. Members have mentioned compensation and environmental protection. I hope that the Minister will go to the greatest possible lengths to ensure that compensation is adequate and that there is as much environmental protection as possible built into the scheme. I do not say that because I have any special remit to speak for the constituents of the hon. Member for Gravesham or for those of my hon. Friends. I see no reason why they should benefit from any greater environmental protection or compensation than people affected by the road schemes in the north of England or Scotland or by rail schemes elsewhere in the country. However, I want people to see proper environmental protection built into this scheme. I want more railways built in the future and, if we can dispense with some opposition in this case, we may be able to dispense with it in the future.

I am not sure how much remains of my 10 minutes but I finish by mentioning freight. Everyone who understands railways knows that the channel tunnel has the potential to open markets for this country and could provide the opportunity to shift freight from the roads to rail for lengthy journeys, which would not have been possible in the past. If we do not take advantage of that, we shall be betraying future generations, our children and their children. We must take this opportunity to shift as much freight as possible from the 44-tonners on to the railway.

Everyone seems frightened of freight trains but they are not the rattly old trains of years ago. Proper braking systems mean that they do not rattle like they used to. Some hon. Members have said that they do not want freight loops to blight their constituents' property but, if we remove any protection from the planned freight routes, we shall be blighting this country.

8.27 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): The hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) has done the House a service by speaking in favour of this type of infrastructure project.

When I was first elected to the House nearly 20 years ago, we would approve, in an hour and a half's debate late at night, sums equivalent to the whole cost of this Bill and the environmental protection costs. We approved the equivalent of £2,000 million or £3,000 million, often the recurrent costs of some nationalised industry which brought virtually no return.

However, the expenditure involved in the measure that we are debating, whether for environmental protection or for the railway line itself, will generate employment not only along the line of route—although that will clearly be the case, and in London—but in factories and industries around the country. I am thinking of the service industries and the engineering, drafting and supply industries, all of which will help to keep this country's economy on the move as well as improve the railway.

I must declare various interests as I have had connections with Eurotunnel, ferries, hovercraft and Seacats and the aeroplanes that provide competitive services. However, I am making a speech partly in the interests of my constituents and partly in the national interest.

The first option of the old British Rail scheme could have run through my constituency. When that possibility existed, none of the environmentalists stood up for those elected to represent Kent and London constituencies who were willing to examine the choices rationally—they went to ground. One of my partisan remarks is that the local Labour party, after making the initial error of saying that it wanted the rail line to come through Eltham, started to exploit the possibility that it might come through in a constituency-political way that was a disgrace to it. I hope that the new modernisers will not do that.

The rail line is being built in the interests of travellers. There may have been a time when most people using the railways had no alternative. Nowadays, almost everyone who uses the railways has an alternative. There will be benefits for travellers in Kent; Ashford and Ebbsfleet being good examples. When we start to halve journey times and when people can get into the city centre more easily, they will make the choice to use the railway because of personal advantage.

In international links, it is the city centre to city centre time that matters. I am not talking just about London to Paris or London to Brussels; I am talking about the other cities to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) referred. Taking an hour off east coast main line journeys to France, Belgium and other European mainland countries will make a dramatic difference to the competitive advantage of the railways.

What is more, there will be an advantage for those on lines that are not served directly by the high-speed link. As people come into Waterloo, as more traffic moves to go into St. Pancras and as some traffic gets a chance to move straight through London, lines such as the Eltham and New Eltham lines should have improvements. From the point of view of self-interest and national interest, this infrastructure project has a great deal to recommend it.

The trouble is that the House has not been very good at giving the operators the consistent backing that they need. We have had feast and famine in capital investment. That is better than the position in the railways a few years ago when there was just famine. The fact is that London Underground and British Rail, for example, have been told before general elections to expect significant extra capital funding which then ebbs away after the election. That makes the money they spend far less effective. Engineers around the country must be tearing their hair out at the ups and downs. I hope that we can find some consistency. As we edge more into private finance initiatives, we may be able to achieve that.

We have had problems with other major infrastructure projects. There were delays in getting permission for the Heathrow express, yet who wants to go out to Heathrow on the M4? It is an irrational choice which is forced on people. The underground service is useful and more reliable than using the road, but we should have had a Heathrow express and we should already have a crossrail system under London which would also relieve the pressures. There has been enormous delay, but crossrail is coming. I do not want to waste the time of the House in going through the problems that crossrail has faced.

There have been problems with the decisions made by Committees of the House. There was the engineering misjudgment by the Committee that considered the Dartford-Thurrock bridge. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) will forgive me; I recognise the service he has given and I leave him on one side.

That misjudgment illustrated that the House had not learnt much since the days when the Manchester-Liverpool railway line was delayed because a clever parliamentary lawyer persuaded Members of Parliament that it was not possible to have a moving engine on a moving wagon pulling freight. He persuaded Parliament that one could have permission to build a railway line only if the engine was put on the side of the track and the train was pulled with ropes and pulleys—

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): An exaggeration.

Mr. Bottomley: An exaggeration? Perhaps.

We have had problems with infrastructure projects. We have had problems with critical projects, such as the Borough Market junction just near London Bridge station where doubling up the railway track would allow Thameslink services to go to London Bridge, where most people want to go—it is certainly where my constituents want to go—rather than to go in the rush hour through Elephant and Castle.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not just go for the Thameslink provision at St. Pancras. He should start to go for parliamentary or statutory approvals for doubling up the rail service at Borough Market junction. That is the key not only for traffic going under the Thames to north London and to the north of London, but for services to Cannon Street, Blackfriars, Waterloo East and Charing Cross. These things matter locally, nationally and internationally.

The issue of private finance came up originally with the Dartford-Thurrock bridge. Such finance was easier because there was a revenue stream to come. When I was Minister for Roads, I went to Japan in the last 1980s and I went on a Shin Kan Sen train—one of the bullet trains. It had new investment, a virtually dead straight line, no commuter trains in the way, no freight trains in the way and it was over-staffed. The Japanese were managing to run their trains 10 mph faster than British Rail was managing on the east coast line on a railway built 100 or more years ago.

Those who criticise British Rail management do not realise quite how effective the railway management and staff have been over the years in keeping an old system going, in modernising it and in keeping the service going. There has not been nearly enough tribute to the people who have managed to achieve that with the ups and downs of Government.

My next point is political. If the way that the Labour party sat on its hands, to put it most gently, over the signalling staff dispute had had the effect of the signalmen's claim, which was totally unjustified, being met, the railways would have been put back 20 years. We were slow in getting matters moving.

There are two key points about railways. One is reliability. The service cannot be interrupted by strikes or disputes—certainly not by unjustifiable strikes and disputes.

The second key point for the railways is capital investment, not current subsidies. What is important is going for competitive advantage. With new technology, we can run trains faster on existing lines. We are getting greater advances in signalling. We are taking out many of the staffing costs and we are taking out many of the bad jobs to which the hon. Member for Nottingham, East referred.

I also echo the point about reducing the noise from freight and passenger trains. The advances that we made through research into the quiet, heavy lorry are coming in terms of quiet, heavier trains. The combination of the technology of the train, the engine and the track will help to reduce the amount of noise to which people are exposed. If more freight goes through residential areas on old, established lines, that is a duty that we owe to local people who will be inconvenienced by what I am told is aural pollution—or is it aural loss?

Mr. Mackinlay: It is spelt A-U-R-A-L—aural. There is a loss of aural amenity. It is a bloody great noise.

Mr. Bottomley: I know how it is spelt and I know what it means, but I tend to call it noise pollution, which is a more straightforward way to refer to it.

My next point is linked to the debate on through ticketing which will be held on Wednesday. There have been jokes about whether people will be able to buy a through ticket from Peterborough.

I believe that it is possible for through ticketing to be available not just at railway stations. On the day that the regulator's options came out, I received a letter from an operating company in my constituency saying that the ticket offices in my stations would be open for longer hours and not shorter hours.

About 40,000 establishments will soon be able to provide national lottery expertise. With new technology, we should be able to buy tickets off line, in advance and at best value prices; that is not available now. The idea that people should buy tickets only at stations is out of date and we do not always get the best value from that.

I look forward to a better future. The people who will gain most from the Bill are those who do not move from the roads as the rest of us switch to trains as often as we can.

8.37 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me for a rare foray on the Back Benches.

I begin by declaring a personal interest. The channel tunnel traffic, having passed for most of its route through north London in a tunnel, will come whistling out of the tunnel about 70 yd behind the back wall of my house. I therefore have a personal interest in what is happening. I also have a deep constituency interest, because several thousand of my constituents are likely to be adversely affected by the current proposals.

I support the principle of the Bill; I support having the channel tunnel high-speed link. The approach through east London is the best approach that could be devised, and St. Pancras is probably the right destination for the link. However, I want it to be done properly, and that is the whole point of the instruction that has been tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is also the tenor of the debate on both sides today.

[Mr. Chris Smith]

The original proposal from Union Railways was that the channel tunnel trains, throughout their passage to Islington, would be above ground, using the existing north London line. After vigorous representation and after a campaign led by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and myself, we managed successfully to persuade the Government to put the line in a tunnel under the north London line for most of its passage through Islington.

There is, however, a remaining problem, which relates to the western edge of the borough. One of the arms of the line will now rise towards the surface just to the east of Caledonian road. Under the proposals currently in the Bill, it will cross Caledonian road in cut and cover. It will then come up on to the surface behind Gifford street and run on the surface from there into the grade-separated junction behind St. Pancras. It is that piece of its travels from the area just to the east of Caledonian road into St. Pancras about which I am especially concerned.

The impact of such proposals will be severe. There will be noise, vibration and disturbance to people who, of course, already encounter considerable disturbance from traffic along the north London line as it exists at the moment. Perhaps even worse will be the impact of construction, because the area to the north of Gifford street and the area immediately to the east of Caledonian road will be used as a large-scale construction site for the whole period of construction—again, under the proposals as they stand in the Bill.

There will be a traffic impact of about 290 lorry movements per day on the Caledonian road. If the cut-and-cover operation across Caledonian road is decided on, together with the proposed work to the Fleet sewer, there will have to be either partial or wholesale closure of Caledonian road, with the diversion of traffic which will inevitably follow, into all the surrounding residential streets. The impact from disturbance, from noise, from vibration, from construction and from traffic diversion on a large number of my constituents will be adverse.

Union Railways has said that it is prepared to look at an alternative: to move the tunnel portal further to the west and perhaps avoid the necessity of cut and cover across Caledonian road by instead going in a bored tunnel under Caledonian road. Kindly, the Minister, in a letter of 3 January, confirmed to me that Union Railways is considering such an option.

But that is not the option in the Bill. If we pass the Bill as it stands, we have no guarantee that Union Railways or the private bidders who will come forward for the work itself will undertake that alternative option. It would be useful if the Minister could give us some guidance on whether we will end up with that proposal rather than the specifics in the Bill, which are not as favourable as those about which Union Railways is now talking.

However, there is a third option, which is favoured by all local residents, is favoured by Islington council and is certainly the option which I have argued—directly to the Minister and to Union Railways—should at the very least be considered. That option is of a tunnel all the way into the railway lands behind St. Pancras.

A study by Alan Baxter Associates has shown that such an option is perfectly technically feasible. It involves putting the grade-separated junction below ground rather than above ground. Yes, it will cost a little more than the current proposals. However, the Cally Rail group, which has been arguing the case very strongly, has demonstrated very clearly that there are compensating advantages in land value in the railway lands which could offset some of that extra cost.

That is a much better option. Union Railways, however, has reacted very dismissively. It has not talked at all about what work it has done or what calculations it has made about the cost of that option. However, it is the best environmental option, it is the best option from the point of view of residents, and it would greatly lessen the impact of construction. The Select Committee ought at the very least to look at that option, to question Union Railways about it, and to see whether it would be technically and financially feasible, as I believe it would be. Having a tunnel all the way into the railway lands would be of enormous relief to my constituents.

So there are four key questions that I would like the Committee to address. First, will it look properly, fully at the option of a tunnel to the west of Caledonian road leading into the railway lands? Secondly, will it ensure that, when construction takes place, it takes place from within the railway lands and not from construction sites immediately next to residential properties on either side of Caledonian road?

Thirdly, what provision will there be for compensation for those residents who are adversely affected not only by the line in its final form, but by the five to seven years of construction work which is likely to take place immediately beside their homes? Fourthly, what future does the Secretary of State have in mind for what is known as the Lough road site, which is excluded from the Bill but which was previously earmarked, disastrously and unnecessarily, for a concrete batching plant? I hope and trust that that plan will now be consigned to the dustbin.

I do not urge that the Bill is abandoned—I think that it should go ahead—but I urge that it should go ahead properly. If it does not go ahead with full environmental protection for those who are affected by it, the lives of hundreds of my constituents, which are currently blighted, will continue to be blighted.

The instruction to the Committee would at the very least give us some hope that the concerns of those people would be considered. I urge the Government and the House to support, if not the letter of the instruction, the purpose of it, and to ensure that the Select Committee considers the needs of those residents who will be affected directly by the proposals in the Bill.

8.47 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Many hon. Members have said that the proceedings of this debate will be obligatory reading for those members of the Select and Standing Committees ultimately dealing with the Bill when it leaves the Floor of the House. I hope that the Select Committee will pay attention to the comments made by all hon. Members, but especially to those my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who encapsulated the particular problems of north-west Kent. In the minutes that I have, I shall try to follow some of his arguments.

One aspect is clear for the members of the Select Committee: those of us in north-west Kent are not in favour of any deviation from the route as set out. The

route, while not entirely acceptable and while having implications for the communities that I represent, is in fact at the point beyond which I would not be prepared to tolerate any further deviation or change.

That is simply because, in the congested area of north-west Kent, any further movement one way or another is bound to impinge and impact on communities that hitherto have thought themselves unaffected. It would be the height of cruelty to them, and it would be misleading and disingenuous, for there to be further changes of which they have not yet received notice.

I want to state at the outset that the decision to site a station with domestic and international links at Ebbsfleet is right. The implications for north-west Kent and for the regeneration of what we used to call the east Thames corridor—now the Thames gateway—is immense. While I listened with interest to Opposition Members with constituency interests which led them to consider Stratford to be more significant than Ebbsfleet, I see no reason why the two stations cannot be built side by side, or alongside each other, at some time in the future.

Hon. Members will understand that Ebbsfleet must be my prime consideration. The implications for employment, regeneration and the long-term development of north-west Kent are great. Colleagues on both sides of the House have stressed that the Government, the Select Committee and Union Railways must get this right, because they have only one chance to do so. We cannot come back in 10, 15 or 20 years' time and decide to unravel what this House has sanctioned. There is no second chance.

I firmly believe that the proposals in the Bill as they will be dealt with by the Select Committee should be related to the impact of construction. The communities near Pepper Hill, to the south and to the north of the A2, face the prospect of many difficult challenges in terms of construction. There will be problems with the passage of vehicles and the movement of spoil, and access to open land, although partly scrubland, will be denied to local people.

While the period of construction may be relatively short in the long-term life of the project, every step must be taken now to safeguard the communities to the south of the A2, and to safeguard the community of Swanscombe to the north. There must be proper and detailed negotiations between the promoters of the Bill and the project and the villages and communities which will be affected unless great care and consideration is taken—the villages of Southfleet, Betsham, Westwood and, slightly further away, of Longfield and New Barn.

I welcome that part of the Bill which relates to the code of practice for construction. I hope that that code will be meaningful, and that it will have teeth. I hope that the functions of the independent commissioner for complaints will be made known to us by the Minister.

Several of my colleagues referred to the implications of freight. I advise the House and the Select Committee to be cautious about the endorsement of freight on the new track. That would be a very dangerous position to endorse, as it has implications for the communities in north-west Kent. If freight is to move along the high-speed link, along the A2, and north from Ebbsfleet to Essex, there are implications for communities on both sides of the river. However, if freight is then to be used on the Gravesend west line to join with the London and Chatham line for onward transmission to Waterloo, there are implications for the movement of freight throughout the night for many of my constituents.

The compensation arrangements are inadequate and poor. We have not learnt the lessons from 1988 and 1989. It is unfair to expect people in stable communities to accept that, for the national good, they must lose real and big value—

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): A clear lesson on compensation should be learned in respect of the arrangements that Eurotunnel reached when dealing with the problem of house values and sales at Cheriton. Those arrangements were extremely generous, and worked extremely well. They minimised a great deal of the delay which might otherwise have occurred.

Mr. Dunn: I am sure that my hon. Friend's words are a lesson to all of us, and particularly to those who will read the report of our debate. There is no doubt that there is a need for a hardship scheme and a need for generosity and sensitivity. Nothing must be done on the cheap, so that my constituents, and those of many hon. Members, lose real value in what is very often their only asset: their home. Better arrangements are needed.

I welcome the Bill, because it positions a station at Ebbsfleet. I welcome it for the regeneration argument and from the point of view of the commuter. I disagree with colleagues who claim that the Southend line is infinitely worse than the north Kent line. The north Kent line is by far the worst line in our region. Anything that can reduce the journey time for people travelling from the Medway towns, from Swanscombe or from Dartford proper, must be welcome. A proper integrated system for train movements on the Waterloo line and the north Kent line is an essential part of the development of the project.

I welcome the project. It must be a proper costed scheme. It must have real environmental considerations and it must not be done on the cheap. None of us in the Chamber now will want to be reminded one day that we got it wrong. There is a real chance to get it right, and I wish the Government every success in their endeavours.

8.55 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I support the Bill, because it is important and significant to the economy and well-being of all our people, and particularly of the people in the north and in the Yorkshire and Humberside region, the area that I represent.

I intervened twice during the debate on the subject of the transfer of freight from the north of England, through the tunnel and into Europe. I want also to consider passenger traffic. People from the north of England should be able to board a fast link train at a station in the north—in Leeds in my area, or in Wakefield—so that they can be transported through the tunnel and into Europe on the same train. I support the Bill, because the sooner we have this high-speed link connection from the tunnel into St. Pancras, the sooner people will be able to travel from Yorkshire and the north on the same train and unit.

In many ways, it is important that the Bill receives its Second Reading tonight. It is important that it receives an endorsement and a speedy process through Committee.

I realise that there are environmental problems. Hon. Members who have an interest because of the link passing through their constituencies have made it clear that they

[Mr. William O'Brien]

want to safeguard their constituents' interests in the light of the environmental problems that can develop with the high-speed link. I endorse hon. Members' request that the Secretary of State and the Committee ensure that their constituents' interests are fully safeguarded. That is why I support the instruction. I sincerely hope that there will be strong regard for the instruction, in order to protect the environment if problems develop or if safeguards are not properly undertaken.

In my interventions, I raised the need to consider the east coast line, because that line will be used extensively to bring passenger and freight traffic from the north of England, through London to the tunnel. Over the past two years, we have seen tremendous problems on the east coast line causing difficulties and extensive delays. Obviously, if we are to spend the necessary money to develop the high-speed link from London to the tunnel, it is important to have the same facility and the same efficiency on the east coast line as we are looking for in respect of the high-speed link.

It was against that background that I raised with the Secretary of State and with other hon. Members the need for special attention to the east coast line. I am pleased that the Secretary of State and other hon. Members have supported my view that it is important that the east coast line is as efficient as the link between London and the tunnel.

Dr. Mawhinney *indicated assent.*

Mr. O'Brien: I am pleased that the Secretary of State nods in agreement.

I raised the importance of freight, because, in my constituency, Wakefield metropolitan district council is building the rail freight terminal, which is due to be completed by the end of this year. I hope to see freight trains leaving Normanton and delivering, through the tunnel, goods which were manufactured or assembled in Normanton. That is an important issue. It means much to the economy and well-being of my constituency. As we have suffered many job losses because of mine closures, it is important that we have the link between Yorkshire and Europe.

One disappointing point for me and for my constituents is that the terminal, which is very important to our area, is receiving no support from the private sector. We have heard much today about the importance of private sector money helping to develop such projects, yet the scheme is being developed only because of the initiative, drive and courage of Wakefield metropolitan district council. I hope that the Secretary of State will impress on his colleague the Secretary of State for the Environment the importance of supporting the application of Wakefield metropolitan district council for European money to help to finance that Euro-terminal.

I bring together freight and passenger transport, because it is important that we in the north of England have the link through London, through the channel tunnel, and into Europe. Freight from the north should be allowed to use the high-speed link. It is important to many manufacturers and commercial undertakings that provide employment that goods arrive in Europe as speedily as possible. That may mean using the high-speed link.

I suggest to the Secretary of State and to the Committee that we ought to consider using every possible moment on the high-speed link for carrying freight from the regions into Europe. Therefore, I hope that we will get some support, and that there will be a constructive investigation into the use of the high-speed link for the transport of freight from the regions through the tunnel.

I welcome the debate, and I support the principle of the Bill. I ask that the instruction be given serious and favourable consideration by the Committee. I hope that my plea for the quick development of passenger transport from the north into Europe via the high-speed link is heard. I also hope that conveying goods and freight from the north is given the same significance as passenger transport. Therefore, I appeal to the House to support the Bill and the instruction.

9.6 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My constituents had—and still have—considerable reservations about the channel tunnel. We believe that the ferry industry of Dover has served the country well for many years. It has certainly served the country well financially, as there is only some £1 billion of capital in total in the ferry industry on the south coastal routes to the continent, compared with an investment so far of £11 billion in the channel tunnel. With the channel tunnel rail link forecast to cost at least £3 billion, it is possible that investment costs will be £15 billion or even £20 billion if there is an overrun on the rail link.

The channel tunnel has already run into considerable financial difficulties. I must recognise, however, that the rail link may bring some travel benefits to my constituents. We are told that travel times to Dover will reduce, and I hope that they will. British Rail's announcement last week that it was not prepared to provide Networker trains to Dover was a disgrace, considering that we have some of the worst timetable problems in the country. British Rail continuously fails to meet a reasonable timetable commitment. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) has, along with me, fought consistently in the campaign, and I pay tribute to him. He fought for better Networker and rail facilities before I came to the House. Something must be done to improve the rail line.

My support for the Bill is limited to the extent that it could benefit my constituents, but I would certainly want it to be amended. My constituents' concern about the Bill is in relation to clauses 30 and 31, which deal with the potential of a Secretary of State to give unlimited financial subsidies to the operator of the channel tunnel rail link. The port of Dover and the ferry industry have hitherto relied on the protection given to them under section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, which states that international passenger services shall not be subsidised.

The Transport Select Committee believed that the ferry industry should be protected against unfair subsidies. My constituents are concerned that clauses 30 and 31 are extremely widely drawn. Subsidies could be unlimited. No clearly defined or specific reason is given for a subsidy. Under the Bill, it is possible for a subsidy to be given for negligence, incompetence or even unfair competition. No audit trails are open to public scrutiny, and no mention is made of whether a subsidy is to be for capital, operating or financing costs.

There is no mention of a required rate of return on the subsidy that might be provided; the public sector is being asked to give a blank cheque. Originally, the subsidy was said to be for extraordinary environmental costs. I had a meeting with the Minister at which that possibility was discussed, yet that is not made clear in the Bill. It was suggested that the subsidy was needed to purchase capacity for Kent commuters, but Kent commuters may get only a tiny proportion of the available use of the link. Therefore, I am worried about how the calculation is to be done to justify using that reason for the subsidy.

I want the Select Committee to put some detailed questions about the subsidy. If there is to be a subsidy, the channel tunnel rail link must be economically unjustified. The Committee should ask why the link is to be constructed in a way that requires subsidy. If a subsidy is necessary for the link, why is subsidy not made available to similar or even better transport projects? What is to be the audit trail for transactions between the channel tunnel rail link company and Eurotunnel? Will public money be used to improve the finances of Eurotunnel? How are we to use appropriate audit methods to avoid that happening?

In a speech on 3 February 1987, the Minister of State said that railways should not

"serve as a channel for Government funds to be provided to Eurotunnel."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1987; Vol.109, c.863.]

How is that commitment to be met in the Bill? If the rail link is to be subsidised, why not subsidise the roads to the ports? The port of Dover still does not have a good connection with the A2. I accept that it has a very good connection to the A20, which was provided as a result of recommendations made by the Select Committee that considered the Channel Tunnel Bill. Perhaps the Select Committee that will examine the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill will also consider the need for fair play and for the A2 to be properly dualled between Lydden and Dover under the Bill.

If public money is to be used, it should be used fairly. That is what I want to see for my constituents in relation to the port of Dover. It is also important that we recognise that the channel tunnel and the channel tunnel rail link company will have several extra legislative benefits in addition to this Bill. They have a dispensation under the Immigration (Carriers' Liabilities) Act 1987. In addition, 44-tonne lorries will be permitted on roads travelling to railheads in connection with the channel tunnel. The French taxe uniforme applies only to the port and ferry industries; it does not apply to passengers using the channel tunnel. It is a grotesque tax that is unfair in its operation. It acts as a tax on the port and ferry industry.

I hope that the Select Committee will also consider the economics of the link and the fact that it may be a loss leader. That could have implications for the fairness of travel costs between the port and ferry industry and the rail link. There is not much time left to go into the detail. Suffice to say that the current forecast is that 10 million passengers will use the rail link. The average single journey revenue will be some £70. I understand that to be a reasonable figure. The railway companies of the three countries will share only some £55. That would give the channel tunnel rail link company some £15 and only some £150 million in revenue.

If the cost of building the link is £3 billion, £420 million of return on capital would be required for a 14 per cent. return on capital. In other words, a loss of some £270 million might be incurred. Even if the rate of return is reduced to that on public sector projects—about 8 per cent.—a return of £240 million would be required, and there would be a shortfall of about £90 million. That shortfall would be considerable, and I hope that the Committee will consider the unfairness of further financial support to the rail link in those circumstances.

I do not have time to make some of the arguments that I wished to make, but I hope to have the opportunity of presenting them in evidence to the Select Committee.

9.14 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I am grateful for the opportunity to use the last few moments of the debate from the Back Benches to make three brief points.

First, I welcome the Bill, which is certainly not before time; we have waited for it for a long time. It is essential to the continued growth of the economy, and it will be a great success. The public and private sectors working together to achieve a result is especially beneficial. I believed from the outset that the line would never be built unless there was some public sector involvement. That was not always a popular argument to advance from the Conservative Benches, but it has proved to be right. I am sure that it will make a major and necessary difference to the commuting journeys of constituents from Kent.

That brings me to my second point. It is essential that the project is prosecuted to be achieved as rapidly as possible. I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would pay attention to the fact that my Sevenoaks constituents already have evidence that, on occasion, Eurostar trains are being given priority on train paths to London, at the expense of regular services.

From the beginning, the House was given assurances by British Rail management, and by Ministers, that the existing timetables and services provided to commuters from Kent would not be disadvantaged by increased traffic serving channel tunnel passengers. It will be unacceptable if people who pay regular season ticket fares, and who depend on British Rail services to take them into London, find that their service, which is not always as good as it should be, is made even worse because of priority being given to Eurostar trains.

It has always been my nightmare that my constituents should stand, shivering, on the platform at Sevenoaks, waiting for a delayed or slow train, while the Eurostar flashes through, with the passengers enjoying their croissants and coffee in comfort. That must not happen at the expense of commuters from my constituency. Therefore, it is necessary to put the line in place as rapidly as possible and take the pressure off existing lines.

Thirdly, I add to the demands made from both sides of the House that the Select Committee must consider the compensation package. It will never be popular with any Government to increase compensation for the disadvantages of blight and of damage done to people's main investment. However, after debating the matter at considerable length in the Standing Committee on the Channel Tunnel Bill, Eurotunnel developed a good arrangement for solving the problems of buying out and compensating people living in the Cheriton district, where the terminal has now been built. That was a private sector company taking a very liberal and positive approach to compensation.

[Mr. Mark Wolfson]

I would commend to the Select Committee that it study those arrangements and, possibly, require private sector operators to take a positive and similar approach to compensation. Ultimately, proper compensation will mean that the relatively few people whose lives have been or will be heavily damaged by the provision of the link will not have their lives wrecked when the rest of the country benefits in a major way from such an essential development.

I welcome the Bill and hope that the Select Committee will pay attention to the wide range of views on compensation expressed in today's debate.

9.19 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I preface my remarks by saying that it was a privilege to listen to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) urging the Government to give more subsidies to ferry companies in his area.

Mr. David Shaw: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman did not hear me correctly. I was saying that, if subsidy is to be given to a connection to the port—in this case the channel tunnel—we should have a proper road connection to Dover.

Mr. McLeish: I understood perfectly well the import of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, and thought it useful to place on record the fact that the hon. Gentleman is considering subsidies.

I do not wish to introduce further discordant notes, because this has been a good-natured and constructive debate in which hon. Members on both sides of the House have expressed issues which relate to their constituencies and are at the forefront of the minds of individuals, organisations and groups within their communities. It is evident from the debate that there is consensus that the Bill should proceed. We can take it as read that there is wide support for this important measure.

We also seek a broad consensus on some of the major unresolved issues. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned compensation, tunnelling and environmental concerns. All hon. Members have said that they are happy to sign up to the Bill, as long as their constituents and organisations are treated fairly and sensitively by all those concerned in the process. That must be said at the start of the wind-up debate because it is a credit to the House.

This is an interesting time to discuss railways. When we discuss through ticketing on Wednesday, we may have more acrimonious exchanges than we have had this evening. The process is vital because, as many hon. Members said, this is not an ordinary construction development. It will take years and years, and many communities will be disrupted in terms of environment, nuisance, noise and general inconvenience. It is therefore right that the House should debate those issues constructively rather than be taken on a tangent to discuss other aspects of the ensuing railways debate.

It is vital that we give a strong lead to the Select Committee and, subsequently, the Standing Committee. The House can do everyone a favour by agreeing to the instruction.

This is also an historic occasion for the House because it is the second biggest investment in rail since we have had railways. That is important because it puts in context the importance of rail in the future, especially if it is to be linked to the trans-European network.

Europe has a vision of an integrated transport system, whether it be road or rail. Fortunately, this project has been included in the 13 key projects that will link Europe and, I hope, other parts of Britain for a more prosperous future. It is therefore important in a European context. It is also vital for Britain. For far too long we have dragged our feet in terms of the nature and level of the investment required to take seriously the idea of improving economic prosperity and giving the passenger a better deal.

The link is also about the regeneration of the south-east, particularly London. Many hon. Members have identified that crucial fact. When considering the benefits that will accrue from this development, it is important that the Select Committee take that issue on board. Obviously, it is not only a matter for the south-east and London. As a Scot, I want to see the benefits of the link experienced by other parts of the United Kingdom. That is absolutely crucial. I do not think that it is a matter of the south-east and London. It is a matter for the wider interest of the United Kingdom.

On a positive note, the Bill is also symbolic of a new age. We can have debates about public and private, and about the degree of investment from either party, but this is an historic event in that we want it to succeed. We want the west coast main line to succeed. We want crossrail to succeed. We want to open up a new era on the railways. Yes, we can have differences on ideology and have ownership discussions, but at the end of the day the travelling public expect a better deal. It is high time that the House accepted that the passenger and our economic prosperity should be high on the agenda.

Those are laudable objectives, but from the discussion this evening, other concerns must be reconciled—whether they be Kent, Thurrock, Barking or Islington—because at the end of the day individuals, groups and organisations will be affected. Communities may be badly affected, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge). It is right that we take some time to identify the key areas that the Select Committee should address, because I would not like to think that the House could take historic decisions without taking into consideration the views of many groups and organisations which are fearful of the implications of a new technology: high-speed trains, the like of which most parts of Britain have not yet seen. All those individuals, groups and organisations need to be treated with respect.

A number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised the issue of finance. It is clear, whether it be inspired speculation or detailed fact, that there is substantial public investment in the so-called "private" link. Whether one measures that in cash assets being transferred into the project from the Euro-passenger service, or whether it is in commissioning track for use by commuters, we are talking about substantial sums of public money.

I raise that matter not to open up a debate on private and public investment but to say that the House, supported by the Government, should use that public investment as leverage with all those involved, to secure the benefits that we have discussed this evening. If we are talking—the figure may be debatable—of a £1.7 billion

contribution to a £3 billion project, the cost of which is rising daily, that is a significant figure. On behalf of all the taxpayers of Britain, whom we represent, we should ensure that Union Railways, the successful nominating undertaker, should be assured that we have an investment and that we want to see a return, not only for Britain but for the communities and interests that we represent.

I had the privilege of accompanying my hon. Friend the Member for Barking on a visit to some of her constituents. I understand that the Minister also visited her constituency. I was appalled by some of the hardships that many of her constituents will have to endure. I would not like to live beside the new tracks that will service the rail link, but they are willing to support the principle of the Bill as long as they get a fair deal. I have to say to Union Railways and to the Government that they do not believe that they are getting a fair deal. That is one of the challenges of the Select Committee: to ensure that the views that have been expressed this evening are taken seriously.

The Government, Union Railways and others are talking about speeds of 145 mph. But we now know that those speeds may be exceeded and that the maximum might be 186 mph. Many people want to be assured that environmental assessments fully acknowledge that those extra speeds may be achieved. That is significant.

In Barking, one of the key issues for the residents was the alternatives to the current route. We have talked about Barking reach and about tunnelling, but those people are equally concerned about compensation. Union Railways' activity on that so far, supported by the Government, has been tawdry. We cannot expect people to have their lives disrupted and their communities ruined, and to be permanently inconvenienced not only for the future but through an intense construction period, without their feeling very angry, dejected and dismayed. Those people are looking for a lead from the House. Again, I urge the Minister to reconsider the instruction.

If the whole of Britain is to benefit, let us not have casualties along the way. People in Barking simply want a fair deal, and I do not think that they are getting one now. Union Railways, the Government and the winning nominated undertaker must think again. We need compensation that is fair, and alternatives that have been properly considered and analysed: if people in Barking are signing up to a principle for Britain, they should also be signing up to a fair deal for themselves.

We have heard representations from Conservative Members about Kent, which contains areas of environmental and conservation interest that should be protected. We are talking about a multi-billion pound project, and I do not think that we should be niggardly about environmental protection. That is why I raise the issue of a substantial input from the public purse. I believe that if we are investing, as custodians of the taxpayers' money, we should look for the best deal possible and not be niggardly. Kent Members more eloquent than I have expressed their concerns.

I mentioned regional development at the outset. This is a project for the whole of Britain, not just the south-east, and we hope to ensure that it is a success. The same model is being used for the west coast main line, and cross-rail may be involved in the future. As I have said, we are talking about a multi-billion pound programme for Britain, and we must get it right. We must consider not only local environmental issues but key funding issues. Although the risk is being taken by the private sector, it must be acknowledged that a substantial amount of public money will be spent.

People on the periphery of Britain feel remote from the south-east, from London and from Europe. We now have an ideal opportunity to say to them, "Have confidence in our railways and our economic future." More important, the House must show that we are concerned about regional infrastructure and key links between the new stations and the east and west coast main lines. That is crucial for all concerned.

I have mentioned compensation and do not wish to dwell on it, but I do not think that we can get away with our current programme procedures. In Barking a handful of people have been offered compensation, but literally hundreds of householders should be able to receive some cash. Is it too much to ask the Minister to say that the Government will look at the matter again? We are not talking about more multi-billion pound investment; we are talking about a price for justice.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who made a case for Stratford station to be considered on the same basis as other options. It is vital for regeneration that such projects be considered seriously. This is a once for all: few channel tunnel rail links will be produced in Britain in the future. That may comfort some hon. Members who fear the consequences, but we must take advantage of what is on offer at every opportunity. As some of my hon. Friends pointed out, the economy of some of the areas involved, especially the east end, requires radical treatment.

I mentioned the construction period earlier. I was struck by my visit to Barking; I am sorry that I could not visit other areas, but the new transport team has been in place for only a few weeks. I realised that the area would not only suffer massive inconvenience, but would be a construction site for many years. It appeared, however, that no thought had been given to road access, road damage, the size of the lorries that would come in and all the other inconveniences. I ask the Select Committee and Ministers to think seriously not only about compensation for the future, but about a way out to compensate for some of the ravages that many people in London and elsewhere will endure throughout the construction process. The issue is the instruction that we are asking the House to support.

Some of the Minister's responses have been helpful, but I do not think that he is willing to accept the instruction as it stands. There are three ways forward. First, he can ask his colleagues to vote against the instruction. That would be a tragedy because some Conservative Members want to support it. It would be folly to vote against an instruction in which many people see common sense.

The Minister's second option is to say, "I do not want to sign up to support it but I will not obstruct it." That would give the right lead to his colleagues who would support an instruction with so much common sense and which does nothing other than ask for the consideration of environmental issues and tunnelling. If the Minister suggests in his winding-up speech that his hon. Friends should oppose the instruction, it will be viewed badly.

[Mr. McLeish]

The Minister's third way out is to say that he will not vote against the instruction. The best message that we can send to people in the communities who will be affected is that the House did not divide. That would ensure that the instruction goes forward as a vote from the Chamber.

Mr. Spearing: Although the instruction is not in my name, it affects parts of east London to which my hon. Friend has referred. Is he suggesting that, because we have not had an intimation that is, in effect, an instruction from the Government, the Committee shall not take particular account of the environmental advantages of tunnelling in some areas? Is it possible that the Minister would say that?

Mr. McLeish: That is a timely intervention. It seems that rhyme and reason are on the Opposition side and that they are shared by many Conservative Members.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What scale of priorities is demonstrated by the instruction? It omits any reference to the urban areas of Northfleet and Gravesend which are close to the rail link.

Mr. McLeish: It refers to the whole route. The spirit of the instruction encompasses many other aspects of the debate. It is about tunnelling and environmental protection. How will it look to the many communities that are affected by our deliberations if the Government decide to vote down an instruction which is so reasonable and which wishes to take people forward in consensus? I hope that the Minister will rethink that issue before delivering his winding-up speech.

It is evident from our tackling of the Bill that we support progress. This is an ideal opportunity to consider issues raised by hon. Members in all parts of the House and come up with solutions. I hope that the Minister will not say that the suggested solutions are far too expensive. This is a multi-billion pound project and we are discussing communities of real people. We are debating the environment generally, but we are also dealing with people's lives and we cannot put a price on what we should do to ensure that their quality of life remains at least as good as it is.

I hope that the Minister will respond positively to all those hon. Members who have raised local issues. At the end of the day the House can claim credit if it supports the principle that puts railways and Britain's economy at the top of the list of priorities. Let us not at the same time make constituents throughout Britain feel like second-class citizens because we have neither the time nor the money to invest in them.

9.39 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): This has been an interesting, good-natured and, for the most part, well-informed debate. I agree with the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) that it has shown a strong consensus in favour of the channel tunnel rail link. Of course, much of the debate has focused on important matters of detail affecting certain communities along the route—matters that are not, of course, mere details for those who live there. It is wholly appropriate that their Members of Parliament have so fully represented their interests and concerns in the debate this evening.

I am afraid that the consensus cannot stretch to the instruction to the Committee tabled by the Labour party. First, I do not favour instructions to the Committee which would tie its hands on which matters it should consider and which it should not. There is no getting away from the force of the words:

"That it be an Instruction to the Committee that".

My right hon. Friend and I, in earlier interventions, stressed the difference between an instruction such as that tabled by the Opposition and the advice or guidance that my right hon. Friend or I might give to the Committee. If the Government had wished to give an instruction to the Committee, we could have tabled the proper motion and specified that matters outside the line of deviation set out in the Bill should not be considered. We have not chosen to do that because, in our view, it is better that such matters are left to the wise discretion of the Committee and that it should not be constrained.

Secondly, if the instruction were to be accepted it would undoubtedly mean fresh property blight and continued uncertainty over a wide area, especially in regard to the options in east London. It would not be possible to adopt the various tunnelling options without affecting the line that the route takes as it comes towards the terminal. Hon. Members' constituents who are not currently affected by the proposals would have their fears raised. It is not in anyone's interest to spread the problem of blight. Indeed, a number of hon. Members have said how devastating the blight has been for their constituents. One effect of accepting the instruction would be to widen the scope and the impact of the blight.

Thirdly, if the instruction was approved it would inevitably lead to considerable delay for the Bill. That would not be in the interests of the vast majority of right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken this evening and urged the need for the link to be provided quickly.

Mr. Chris Smith: I have carefully followed what the Minister has been saying, but it seems to be inconsequential. He said that he did not want to rule anything out of the Committee's consideration, but then said that there would be a delay if the Committee considered some of the matters raised by my hon. Friends. If he is worried about delay, that means that he wishes to rule things out. Which is it? I hope that he will not rule out some of the options from the Committee's consideration.

Mr. Watts: As my right hon. Friend said in his opening remarks, we hope that the Committee will not consider it necessary to spend time examining options that were considered many times before the Government reached a final conclusion on what we thought was the best route. However, that is very different from either an instruction to the Committee that it should not do so or, as proposed by the Opposition, an instruction that it must do so.

Mr. Spearing: If my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) moves the motion and the Government oppose it and win, is the Minister confident that that will not constrain the Committee from doing what is suggested in the instruction if it so wishes? Negativing the instruction would be a serious matter if it constrained the Committee in the way that the Minister claims he does not want.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Gentleman almost takes my next words out of my mouth. I was about to urge the hon. Member for Fife, Central not to press the instruction to a

vote, because if the House rejects the instruction, as I urge it to do, the Committee may feel constrained by that expression of the opinion of the House from considering these matters, even if it might otherwise have been minded to consider them.

Therefore, from the point of view of hon. Members who want the Committee to consider petitions relating to those options, and from the point of view of hon. Members whose main concern is that we should make rapid progress with the passage of the legislation and with the implementation of this important project, it is wise for the House not to give such an instruction.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Rowe: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could you help the House at this crucial point? There has been some discussion as to whether, in the opinion of your Clerks, the decision to vote down an instruction constitutes, in effect, an instruction to the Select Committee not to do something.

Madam Speaker: The playing field is as level as it ever was. Such a decision does not constitute an instruction of that kind.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, and to the Minister. I think that we are getting into a contradictory tangle. If the Minister was right to say that the defeat of the instruction would preclude the Committee from taking it into consideration, that would elongate the process even more. As Madam Speaker has now said that the instruction would not be precluded, I presume that this is all irrelevant and that hon. Members on both sides of the House can do what they want and vote for the instruction to guide, to use the Minister's own word, the Committee on how it should proceed.

Mr. Watts: I did not say that the voting down of the instruction would preclude the Committee from considering it. I said that, if the House rejects the instruction, the Committee may feel constrained, by that clear expression of the will of the House, not to consider these matters, even if it might otherwise have been minded to do so. Sound reasons exist as to why there should not be an instruction from the House to the Select Committee, but the House should have confidence in the hon. Members and possibly right hon. Members who will be appointed to the Committee to use their judgment, to take into account the cogent arguments that have been advanced today and the representations that will be made to the Select Committee, and then to reach their own judgment.

Mr. McLeish *rose—*

Mr. Watts: I give way for the last time.

Mr. McLeish: Clearly, we are becoming a bit disingenuous. Will the Minister sum up the position by saying why he will not support the instruction? We now have a double view of what may happen in Committee if we do not do pass the instruction. Is it not right and proper for the Minister either to support the instruction or not to vote against it, to allow the general will of the House to go forward to the Committee?

Mr. Watts: It would not be right for me to try to sit on the fence. If I cannot recommend to the House that it should accept the instruction, it is right for me to advise the House to reject it.

Many points have been raised during the debate. I have 12 minutes left. I shall try to cover as many points as I can, but I give an undertaking to hon. Members to whom I may not have time to respond, that I shall seek to do so in writing after the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) will forgive me if I do not seek to respond immediately to the figures that he quoted. As one accountant to another, I undertake to reflect on them when I see them in the official record.

Not surprisingly, one of the major issues this evening has been the station at Stratford, which I and several Newham Members had the opportunity of debating in the early hours of the morning shortly before Christmas. I accept that a station at Stratford would assist the regeneration of the Stratford area. As I have explained, the option of a station there remains open by the provision in the Bill for the construction of a large open box.

The decision on whether there shall be a station at Stratford will be taken when we have received the bids from the four consortiums in March. As the House will recall, the bidding consortiums have been required to bid on various permutations, including the possibilities of a station at Stratford and no station at Stratford. This will be a good way to assess the economic viability of a station at Stratford in addition to the other two intermediate stations already provided in the Bill. We shall be in a position to make a proper and objective judgment on the basis of that evidence.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) mentioned connections to crossrail. We have long made it clear that we have not ruled out the possibility of a connection from crossrail to the channel tunnel rail link, but it must be a matter for the private sector promoters of the two projects to agree, first, that it is in their mutual interests to secure the provision of such a link and, secondly, to seek the powers under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to provide for it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) raised an important issue which was also mentioned by other hon. Members—how important it is that the benefits of the fast link should not be exclusively for London and the south-east but for the regions. In fact, it will be a requirement on the promoter of the project to build junctions outside St. Pancras to allow through services from the channel tunnel rail link to the east coast main line serving Peterborough, York, Newcastle and Edinburgh and to the west coast main line serving Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester. St. Pancras will provide an easy interchange within the station to the midland main line serving Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield. The House will know that it is already intended that services from Wales and the west country to Waterloo will commence in the near future.

The Government therefore remain firmly committed to ensuring that the benefits of this important new piece of transport infrastructure shall be of benefit not only to London and the south-east but to the regions. Bringing the whole country closer to our European markets where we do so much business is an important benefit that we seek to secure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) raised the issue of noise mitigation and reminded us that the mitigation incorporated in the Bill has been designed for train speeds of up to 140 mph, whereas there is at least an expectation in many people's minds that the promoter will want to run trains at the maximum feasible speed of

[Mr. Watts]

186 mph. If that proves to be the case, the arrangements will ensure that the mitigation provided must be equivalent to that which would have been provided for the lower speed and, if the noise mitigation required for higher-speed operation cannot be provided, a limitation on speed would be imposed.

I am advised that over the vast majority of the route there is no difficulty about the adequacy of the land designated in the Bill for mitigation measures for the higher speed. It would be reasonable to expect that, if the private sector operator of the route intended to run trains at the higher speed, he would wish to build the mitigation to the higher standard from the outset rather than adding additional measures at a later stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) raised the issue of the 3 m upward limit of deviation. Most of the 3 m upward limit of deviation is needed for technical reasons to do with the accuracy of the mapping base and the way in which Parliament requires sections to be prepared, but we are considering carefully whether there are ways to meet the concerns about the 3 m limit without undermining the promoter's ability to build the new line.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) spoke about the route through Rainham. Having listened carefully to the views expressed locally during the consultation exercise, we decided to provide an additional 10 m gap between the rail link and the London-Tilbury-Southend line as it passes residential areas in Rainham. This has allowed for further mitigation to provide noise protection from the channel tunnel rail link and the London-Tilbury-Southend line. However, the alignment proposed by the Rainham residents association was considered to be unacceptable as it would have resulted in the rail link severing a series of industrial and development sites, thus constraining development in the area.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) raised the important issue of the Mardyke Park housing estate. It is true that the viaduct carrying the rail link past the estate will have noise and visual impact. There is, however, scope for reducing the number of houses affected by means of revised mitigation proposals, such as the use of higher or different types of noise barriers. We did not accept the alternative options for the alignment of the route in the area which were put forward during consultation, notably the short and long tunnel option or the viaduct option, as they all proved to be extremely costly in relation to the environmental benefit that they could deliver.

My hon. Friends the Members for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) both spoke about the crossing of the Medway. Having road and rail viaducts adjacent to each other will require careful attention to design. In principle, it must be preferable to concentrate crossings at a single point rather than to create a fresh crossing further upstream. Furthermore, having a single new structure is impractical for a number of reasons, including the fact that access to the M2 at junction 2 would be restricted. A tunnel would be very expensive, with an additional cost of more then £100 million.

I cannot give an absolute commitment that the two structures will be built concurrently. The co-ordination of funding and contract-letting would be a major challenge. The Government recognise, however, that concurrent construction may have some advantages in reducing the environmental impact and there is continued co-operation between the two project teams. It may help that, as I have ministerial responsibility for railways and roads, I may be able to have some small part in trying to ensure this co-ordination. I am well aware of the local concerns about the environmental impact of both the rail link and the widened M2, especially in terms of noise pollution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) referred to the problems of Pepper Hill housing estate. There should be no physical impact on the housing estate from the construction or the operation of the rail link. Following the announcement of the route in the area last April, the rail link route no longer passes underneath the estate, but goes through a cut-and-cover tunnel under the A2 to the west of the estate. The residents may, however, experience some impact from the movement of construction traffic.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) and other hon. Members referred to the purchase proposals. As I said to my right hon. Friend in the debate on 15 December, I recognise that there should be a read-across between the compensation for road schemes and rail schemes, and I recognise the merits of having a set of schemes that apply with equal validity to both modes. The schemes currently operated have been designed to be broadly comparable, although my right hon. Friend, I know, believes that in a number of respects, they fail to meet that objective.

The Government have undertaken to consider what more might be done to help people who, despite the best efforts that have been made to minimise the impact, are seriously affected by the construction and operation of the channel tunnel rail link. In addition, the Department is considering the implications of a recent decision by the Court of Appeal. In the light of that, decisions will be taken on how to deal with applications for road schemes. Given the similarity in operation of the separate channel tunnel rail link scheme, a decision will be taken on how that should read across to the channel tunnel rail link.

I met many of the constituents of the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), in her company, before Christmas. I recognise that there are serious problems for many of them from the construction of the route and, in some instances, from its subsequent operation. I know of the strength of feeling among the hon. Lady's constituents that more should be done. As I have just explained, we are giving further consideration to the property purchase arrangements currently in place.

I commend the Bill to the House and I hope that the House will reject the instruction proposed by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), his hon. Friends and other hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second Time.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of Secretary Mawhinney relating to the committal of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill to a Select Committee and any Motion for an Instruction to the committee on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK BILL

Ordered,

That the Bill be committed to a Select Committee of nine Members, five to be nominated by the House and four by the Committee of Selection.

That there shall stand referred to the Select Committee—

(a) any Petition against the Bill presented by being deposited in the Private Bill Office at any time not later than 30th January 1995, or, in a case where the Petition is that of a single individual or of individuals in their capacity as residents, at any time not later than 6th February 1995, and

(b) any Petition which has been presented by being deposited in the Private Bill Office and in which the Petitioners complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled-up Bill or of any matter which has arisen during the progress of the Bill before the Select Committee,

being a Petition in which the Petitioners pray to be heard by themselves, their Counsel or Agents.

That, notwithstanding the practice of the House that appearances on Petitions against an opposed Private Bill be required to be entered at the first meeting of the Select Committee on the Bill, in the case of any such Petitions as are mentioned in sub-paragraph (a) above on which appearances are not entered at that meeting, the Select Committee shall appoint a later day on which it will require appearances on those Petitions to be entered.

That any Petitioner whose Petition stands referred to the Select Committee shall, subject to the Rules and Orders of the House and to the Prayer of his Petition, be entitled to be heard by himself, his Counsel or Agents upon his Petition provided that it is prepared and signed in conformity with the Rules and Orders of the House, and the Member in charge of the Bill shall be entitled to be heard by his Counsel or Agents in favour of the Bill against that Petition.

That the Select Committee have power to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place and to report from day to day the Minutes of Evidence taken before it.

That Three be the Quorum of the Select Committee.—[Mr. Watts.]

Motion made, and Question put,

That it be an Instruction to the Committee that in any consideration of any evidence relating to the Boxley Long Tunnel, the Caledonian Road area of Islington, the West Thurrock and Purfleet section, and the Barking and Dagenham section, they shall take particular account of the environmental advantages of tunnelling as against the proposed surface works; and that the Committee shall satisfy itself that the best possible provision for both environmental protection and compensation has been achieved throughout the length of the route.—[*Mr. Meacher.*]

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 286.

Division No. 37] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Dalis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John

Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. George Mudie and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir A *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(S upon Avon)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerald
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John

Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK BILL [*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure of the Secretary of State under the Act.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Question agreed to.

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E(5) (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee.

Question agreed to.

CHILDREN (SCOTLAND) BILL [*Money*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Children (Scotland) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State incurred in consequence of the provisions of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Question agreed to.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Matter of the Welsh economy, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet, and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of Standing Committees), the first such sitting shall not commence before Eleven o'clock and the second such sitting shall not commence before half-past Two o'clock and neither sitting shall continue after the Committee has considered the Matter for two hours at the sitting.

Ordered,

That, in the course of its consideration of the Matter of the Welsh economy, the Welsh Grand Committee may meet in Cardiff on Monday 30th January at Eleven o'clock.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Flooding (Strathkelvin)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The very notification of the debate tonight on the flooding in Strathclyde region has already wrung some concessions from the Government, and Opposition Members welcome that. I trust, however, that the debate will wring further concessions and clarifications of the Government's position on an important topic.

There are two main issues associated with the flooding, the first of which is the immediate funding package made available by the Government and its inadequacy. That has already been dealt with extensively by myself and my colleagues, and it will continue to be the subject of debate and pressure in the future.

I wish to concentrate tonight on the whole question of the prevention of flooding within the areas involved. More than anything, our constituents would now like a reassurance that such flooding will not happen to them again.

As background, Madam Speaker, I shall introduce you to a part of my constituency and explain what happened during the flooding. The flooding resulted from an overflowing of the main River Kelvin, its tributaries in the Allander valley—the Glazert and the Luggie—and a small contribution from the Park burn. That produced extensive flooding throughout the Kirkintilloch and Hayster areas, at Eastgate, Summerfield and Ledgate. The flooding extended to the village of Torrance, and into Bardowie and Lennoxtown.

As a result, 271 houses in my constituency were evacuated. Most, but not all, of those were private accommodation. Here I pay tribute to my constituents for the fortitude and good humour with which they bore the disaster. When I toured on the Monday, the place was awash and it was impossible to see anything. By the time I came back on the Wednesday, floorboards were up, walls had been chipped away and dehumidifiers were in. Their conduct was a tribute to them, and to the area in which they live. The second difference in the flooding in my constituency was the amount of business that was affected. It is reckoned that about 400 jobs were lost, at least temporarily, as a result of the flooding. It affected 30 small businesses and two large businesses, at a total cost of £4.2 million.

The third difference was the vast amount of agricultural land involved. It will cost thousands of pounds to pick up the debris and deal with the soil erosion. The fourth and most tragic difference was that there was loss of life in the neighbouring constituency. Sadly, two young boys were swept away. I know that I speak for the whole House when I send my condolences to the relatives of those involved.

Flooding in the Strathkelvin and Cart valleys and other areas is not a new problem. The first recorded incident in my area was in 1892. In 1906, Broomhill hospital was once again isolated. That happened again this time. There have been extensive floods in the past. The first attempt to prevent flooding occurred in 1903. A petition was raised to Dumbartonshire and Stirling district council to persuade it to raise the banks of the Kelvin.

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

The matter was first raised in the House of Commons by Tom Johnston, the then Member of Parliament. According to *The Herald* of 20 June 1923, he asked the Under-Secretary to the Scottish Board of Health

"if he was aware of the loss of national resources occasioned by the continual flooding of the River Kelvin between Kelvin Head and the weir at Killermont".

The response that he received from a Captain Elliott was:

"Neither the Board of Agriculture nor any other Department has any power to carry out a scheme to intervene in such proceedings."

That was an ominous sign. Even then, no one was accepting responsibility. The Minister said, "It is not my problem. Please go away."

As a result of pressure from Tom Johnston, the Land Drainage Act 1941 was passed. I am sure that the Minister will tell us about it tonight. In 1936, the first flood prevention scheme was set up in the Kelvin. The river was widened and deepened, and the banks were built up. The weir at Garscube was removed.

The question of prevention was finally raised in the House in 1945. The boot was on the other foot now, and Tom Johnston was in charge. He said in response to a question from Mr. Adam McKinlay about flooding in the Kelvin valley that the recommendations made in the engineers' report were receiving consideration with a view to determining what further remedial work could most successfully be undertaken under the statutory provisions of the Acts of 1930 and 1935.

So there we have it. An engineer's report in 1945 was being given further consideration. That brings us to today. Almost nothing new has happened. I trust that that will not be the outcome of the most recent floods.

What of the future? What can be done to prevent flooding again? It is not new. We had floods in 1991 and 1992, although they were not so extensive. I pursued them with the Scottish Office. Contained in the usual fairly long letters again was the sentence:

"The Regional Council has wide powers under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 to protect non-agricultural land against flooding. Schemes confirmed by the Secretary of State under the Act can attract grant assistance."

I was not happy with that, so I wrote again. On 18 June 1992, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who will answer the debate today, replied:

"Nevertheless, the regional and islands councils have wide powers, either to contribute towards the cost of flood prevention works or to carry out themselves works on any watercourse which they regard as necessary".

In the package that has been announced by the Scottish Office, again we have the statement:

"Should Strathclyde Regional Council as the flood prevention authority decide in the light of that study, or following their general consideration of the issues arising, . . . a grant of 50 per cent. will be payable on the cost of any such schemes which may be submitted to and approved by the Secretary of State."

That is all very well, but there are a number of problems. The regional council's powers are only permissive. If they want to do anything, the statutory authority of the Secretary of State is needed. That is a lengthy, difficult, time-consuming process. We want something to be done now, not some time far in the future.

Another problem is that it is all very well for the Scottish Office to say that 50 per cent. grants are available, but first the regional council must be given permission by the Secretary of State for the borrowing power to obtain the original 50 per cent., which he almost always refuses. In other words, the Secretary of State has the power over the whole 100 per cent., not simply 50 per cent.

The final problem is that the regional councils will be wound up in a short time, and different authorities will then be involved. The matter will be passed on to successor authorities, and we shall be back in a shambles.

If one considers who has the powers at the moment concerned with flooding prevention, one will see that it is the riparian owners for private land, the Department of Agriculture for agricultural land and the Clyde river purification board, and the Government have their own statutory responsibility under the Land Drainage (Scotland) Acts 1930 to 1941. That obviously is a shambles, which allows the buck to pass from one authority to another: as I, my constituents and my colleagues have found, everyone says, "It isn't me. Go away. Please see someone else about it."

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, while that buck is being passed around, many of our constituents in Strathkelvin and elsewhere will be buying new furniture and spending thousands of pounds preparing to move into their homes again, and that they want to know that the floods will not happen again, and that their furniture and their lives will not be destroyed again?

Mr. Galbraith: My hon. Friend raises an excellent point. I pay tribute to him and all his colleagues in the area, who work hard, together with many others, on behalf of the people in their constituencies.

It is obvious to everyone that all roads on the matter lead to the Secretary of State. He alone has the powers and the money to tackle the problem. The only way to co-ordinate it—to pull all those bodies together and tackle matters in the future—is for the Secretary of State to act.

Therefore, we are asking for a number of things from the Minister. First, we would like funding of a comprehensive hydrological study into the whole river system—the Clyde, the Kelvin, the Cart and its tributaries—and the means of preventing further damage. The Government have announced that £10,000 will be made available to the Clyde river purification board. We welcome that, but we doubt that it is even remotely enough to solve the problem. It is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) obviously likes that metaphor.

Will that money allow for a study of the dredging of the Clyde? It is suggested that that is one of the problems in the Kelvin. Will it allow for a study of the infill by dumping of the flood plains, such as those at Twechar, Kilsyth, Bardowie and Somerston, with rubbish? Will it allow for consideration of altering the course, raising bridges, building up the banks and controlling flood plains? We need answers, and we suspect that the money is not enough.

We also wish the Minister to give some assurance that, when problems are identified, the Scottish Office will not merely consider solutions, but will approve them and fund

them. Until the Scottish Office gives that borrowing consent, as I said, the other 50 per cent. grant is not available. We want some reassurance from the Scottish Office that it will do that, and further, that, as a consequence of that, it will follow up with extensive statutory powers, and do so quickly. We cannot allow the matter to drag on year after year, month after month. We need the statutory powers to be given quickly, so that the work can be done.

Finally, it is important for the future that planning authorities have a statutory obligation to consult some organisation when they are considering changes that might affect flooding—for example, filling in the flood plains or altering roads, as happened in Stirling.

Mr. Brian Donohoe (Cunninghame, South) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Galbraith: It is also possible in my constituency, where the Kelvin low road was raised and is now the Kelvin high road. That probably acts as a barrier, which caused flooding of the industrial estate.

Planning authorities have no statutory responsibility to consult. I think it would be proper if, in the Environment Bill currently before the House of Lords, the new Scottish Environmental Protection Agency were the organisation that had to be statutorily consulted. Those are the further requests that we make of the Minister tonight. All our constituents throughout Paisley, Irvine, Renfrewshire, Pollok, other parts of Glasgow, Rutherglen, Cathcart and my area of the Strathkelvin valley have suffered. That suffering will show no barrier, but will cross social paths and geographical boundaries. The despair, desperation and absolute abjectness has been felt by everyone in all those areas.

Those people are looking for some appreciation by the Government of their problem, and some financial compensation for the expenses involved for the local authorities and sometimes the individual. But, more than anything else, they seek reassurances about the future. Within what is physically possible, given the limits of human power, they want a reassurance that such a disaster will not befall them again. They seek hard-headed, concrete, extensive reassurance from their Government tonight.

10.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) on obtaining the Adjournment debate tonight, and thank him for the manner in which he has presented his case. I also thank his many colleagues who have stayed behind to listen to what he had to stay on this extremely important matter.

The Government fully appreciate the concerns and distress caused by the floods. We have every sympathy, particularly with the families of the two young men who lost their lives in the bridge accident, which was a great tragedy to the family and all concerned.

I accept absolutely what the hon. Gentleman said about the devastating effect on residents and businesses during the run-up to Christmas. I know that many, many houses were damaged—the hon. Gentleman said that the figure was 271, whereas I was informed that it was 255 in Strathkelvin. Furthermore, the industrial and business premises of some 60 companies at five industrial parks were severely damaged. Transport, electricity and other services were seriously disrupted.

To put the matter in context, the flood was exceptional, as there had been exceptional rainfall. Interestingly, in the Kelvin catchment area, no less than 7.1 in of rain fell over two days. Normally, we get excited if an inch of rain is recorded at any one time, which shows what a phenomenal downpour it was. It is no consolation to those involved that it was the highest recorded rainfall.

I am told that, statistically, it happens only once every 500 years. The rivers rose dramatically: the Clyde was 4.5 ft higher than ever previously recorded at Daldowie, and the Kelvin was 5 ft higher than its previous maximum. Those are all exceptional figures, and it may be that no reasonable flood bank could have withstood the rise in the rivers on that weekend.

Obviously, action has been and will be taken. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Secretary of State visited Kirkintilloch, and the Ministers responsible for industry and for housing visited Paisley and Renfrew respectively to help assess what needed to be done. I commend, as they did, the local authorities. I mention in particular Mr. Neil McIntosh, with whom I worked closely in Lockerbie, who quickly set up an operation centre. I also commend the fire service and the voluntary and private sectors, which provided hot meals and supporting activities, and all the officials who did excellent work, particularly during the critical weekend.

Contrary to some attacks on the Government, we felt that we responded quickly and well. The Department of Social Security immediately made £120,000 available to the social fund, and we were soon able to trigger the Bellwin system, which made available an 85 per cent. grant on local authority expenditure.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Those of us who have experienced for the first time floods that bad now know that the Bellwin formula is a con. We heard today from the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who is an Under-Secretary of State, that the Secretary of State has powers under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to spend whatever money he deems necessary. There is no need for the Government to stick to the Bellwin formula, so will they now use those powers to help our people to rebuild their lives and their homes?

Sir Hector Monro: I heard what the hon. Gentleman said, and appreciate what he and his hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) have been through and what they have attempted to achieve in recent weeks on behalf of their constituents. The answer today is important, and my hon. Friend will act on it. But the hon. Gentleman must not decry the Bellwin scheme. He is wrong to do that.

The Bellwin formula has worked effectively over a number of years—perhaps 15—and is triggered as soon as the figures are available, to ensure that they reach the trigger levels. That was done within the week after the flooding. No firm figures are yet available, although one estimates that it could well be £10 million in Strathclyde alone. We will look at the capital costs as sympathetically as possible. As Opposition Members know, we fulfilled the request of Strathclyde region for the supplementary

[Sir Hector Monro]

capital allocation of £1.365 million in full. The main beneficiaries should be the roads, water and sewerage areas that were badly damaged in the flooding.

Some £100,000 is available for the Renfrew housing capital allocation, and £150,000 to other authorities. We will look sympathetically to the 1995-96 capital allocations in that area.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Does the Minister agree that all that is being offered is borrowing consent? The very people who were flooded and who have suffered most will pay back most, through extra council house rents and council taxes. The Government are giving nothing more than a loan to people who have already lost everything—a loan that will have to be paid back.

Sir Hector Monro: I appreciate what the hon. Lady is saying, but one might say that the world of local authority finance cannot really be changed overnight. It has operated through all forms of disasters over many years, relative to the Bellwin scheme and the capital allocation.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Hector Monro: No, I have not very much longer to complete a number of points raised by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden.

We have agreed today with the Clyde river purification board to provide £10,000 for a comprehensive hydrological study to help the future issue of flooding.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Sir Hector Monro: Very quickly.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the Minister tell us why, when Windsor castle burned down, overnight the Government were able to find £35 million, yet some six weeks after the flooding, all they have found is £10,000? Is that not a ridiculous state of affairs?

Sir Hector Monro: That is a totally irrelevant issue.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden was generous enough to say that he was pleased to hear about the arrangement to provide a contribution to the studies on the hydrological survey. The issue of Strathclyde is taking a lead over urban water courses and sewers. A great deal is going on, and one must not decry the efforts that are being made.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that the Kelvin became a raging torrent. As I said, it rose 5 ft above its previous maximum. He wanted to know what action will be taken. He went through some of the history of flooding, but he really cannot go past the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961, which puts the responsibility on local authorities. *[Interruption.]* That is the position. Flood prevention must be provided by local authorities.

The hon. Gentleman said that 50 per cent. had gone on the capital costs when approved by the Secretary of State. There is no reason why he should not approve capital expenditure on flood prevention. Local authorities, which are there to look after their constituents, must present schemes for flood prevention, and when they have presented such schemes throughout Scotland, we have been glad to provide the required allocations.

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): When Glasgow presented such a scheme 20 years ago, the then Secretary of State—Campbell by name—refused to provide any assistance.

Sir Hector Monro: Well, there is some more history for hon. Members.

If a reasonable council presents constructive plans for flood prevention—we encourage councils to do that, but they rarely give flood prevention priority—we are glad to consider the matter carefully, and give as much help as we can. We are currently considering the severe flooding on Tayside a year ago, and exactly the same considerations apply to the Clyde river basin as to the Tay river basin. Councils must present proposals. They have powers to deal with maintenance, and a 50 per cent. grant for capital expenditure. That applies throughout Scotland.

Water and sewerage capital expenditure in Scotland is now running at £720 million over the next three years. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is irrelevant."] No, it is not; it is very important. It is part of the duty of local authorities to present flood prevention schemes where they are required, and a percentage of the large sums involved should be spent on flood prevention.

Strathclyde's current expenditure programme for water services is £89 million—double the figure set five years ago. It should have considered spending some of that money on flood prevention. Only about £4 million has been spent on the Brock Burn scheme on the White Cart. I hope that the region is looking seriously at its priorities.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden mentioned severe agricultural damage. Farmers were alert, and most of the stock was removed; I do not think that the damage was very severe, although a good deal of damage was done to fencing and drainage. It will be easier to clarify the position once the land has settled down again, and it has been possible to assess the damage. The Agriculture and Fisheries Department expects expenditure to be around £20,000 in the Kelvin catchment area.

There is a 50 per cent. grant towards repairs to flood banking and so forth in the less-favoured area, and one of 40 per cent. in the non-LFA region. We shall examine all the issues very carefully when considering the provision of grant to support agriculture: the Government are as concerned about people in that industry as they are about businesses and householders.

There is also the issue of dredging. I was interested to note that the Kelvin scheme, for which the Scottish office is responsible, has been running at around £10,000 a year; I hope that that will continue, so that there is no possibility of the Kelvin's silting up and making floods more likely in the future.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned dredging the Clyde, which is a matter for Clydeport plc. Dredging is for navigation rather than flood prevention. Clydeport plc has no responsibility for flood prevention—nor, indeed, had the Clyde port authority beforehand—but the present dredging policy is unlikely to affect flood levels in either the Clyde or the Kelvin.

We understand that Strathclyde and Glasgow districts have agreed to contribute to dredging in the upper Clyde. That may alleviate flooding further upstream than is covered by Clyde port authority.

Mr. Donohoe: The Minister has not mentioned Irvine.

Sir Hector Monro: No, because the hon. Gentleman did not mention it. I know that other areas in Scotland, including Dumfries, were flooded. Whitesands was flooded, and I am afraid that that probably happens every year. Many areas of Scotland suffered from the downpour, and some areas suffered severe flooding.

In a wet country such as Scotland, we cannot always guarantee that such flooding will never happen again. I agree that we want proper flood prevention where that is possible. The local authorities must take a lead, because they are nearest to the areas. They must present the necessary plans for the Government to approve, so that we can provide 50 per cent. capital allocation.

A note has reached me which states that the works at Irvine are in hand via the development corporation. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) has not been overlooked—as, of course, he never would be.

We are conscious of the devastating effects of the flooding, and we are anxious that the hydrological survey should point a way to the future. I am insistent in highlighting the point that Strathclyde must present plans for areas where serious flooding is likely to recur. If such plans are presented for consideration by the Government, they will receive capital allocation approval.

Too often, regional authorities have stood back and spent little on flood prevention. When serious issues such as this arise, everybody tries to blame the Government rather than the authorities which ought to have the prime responsibility for carrying out the work. I assure the House that we are anxious in every way that I have mentioned to assist the constituents in those areas that were severely hit, on whom the flooding had such a devastating impact. We shall help them in every way we can, and I am very glad—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 17 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

SHEFFIELD ASSAY OFFICE BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Health Appointments Systems

1. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the health appointments systems.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): The Government's aim is to ensure that the national health service continues to benefit from the appointment of the best possible people with a wide range of skills to serve as chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and trusts.

Mr. Milburn: Is the Minister aware that the system for appointing people to serve on health authorities and trusts is now widely discredited? Will he agree with the following three simple steps to open up the health appointment system? First, will he publish a full list of those nominated; secondly, will he make clear the selection criteria that Ministers use; and, thirdly, will he itemise, as for magistrates, the party political affiliations of those chosen to serve? Or does the Minister continue to believe that jobs for the boys and jobs for the girls are more important than public accountability in the national health service?

Mr. Malone: The system has certainly been extremely unfairly impugned by the hon. Gentleman and members of his party. The system is open and accountable. Measures are being put in hand to advertise the non-executive posts more widely to attract a wider range of people, with all the business skills and talents and other necessary skills in the community. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to improve matters, perhaps he will submit to the Nolan committee the disgraceful letter from Labour's national executive committee that instructs members of the Labour party who serve in non-executive capacities to report back to Walworth road. That is where the problem lies.

Mr. Devlin: Will my hon. Friend congratulate some of the well-known Labour supporters in the north of England, such as Brian Hanson, who serve on national health service trusts and do quite a good job and who disagree with the contentions of the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on the health service but agree with the British Medical Association, which says that it is not the time for further major organisational upheaval?

Mr. Malone: Yes, I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. In fact, I would go further and say that the vast majority of all those, from whichever party, who serve in non-executive capacities do a first-class job. They are taking the health service forward and deserve the greatest congratulation on the voluntary service that they provide.

National Health Service Reorganisations

2. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out, by year, the reorganisations of the national health service that have taken place since 1979.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Major legislative changes were made in 1980, 1984 and 1990, as a result of which 2.5 million more patients are treated in hospital every year and the number of coronary bypass and cataract operations has more than doubled. The number of patients waiting more than a year for treatment is a quarter of the size that it was. I promise the House even more improvements following the publication of our new patients charter tomorrow.

Mr. Mackinlay: Have not Tory Governments reorganised the management structure of the health service on at least nine occasions since 1979? Is not it like painting the Forth bridge, except that the painting of that is normally completed before it is started again? Will the Secretary of State reflect on the enormous cost to the public purse of those bogus reorganisations, which have sapped morale, lost expertise and meant that people who are dedicated to the national health service have not been able to care for patients?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman should address his remarks to his own spokesman, or possibly to his party leader. We are not entirely sure how health policy is approved in his party; perhaps Richard Rosser, the transport worker who chairs the hon. Gentleman's policy committee, approves it. Our changes have much improved the efficiency of the service and have increased the quantity and quality of care. It is the hon. Gentleman's party that is threatening upheaval and turmoil and to undo all the good achieved by health service workers in recent years.

Mrs. Roe: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government believe that the process of national health service reorganisation is now drawing to a close and that it will be her priority to create stability, under which staff can realise the full potential of the new system? Is that not in stark contrast with Labour's proposals, which threaten to tear the NHS up by its roots, thus inflicting massive damage on staff and patients? Does that not show in whose hands the NHS is really safe?

Mrs. Bottomley: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's points. Health service staff have worked hard to achieve a quality of care that is now being observed by independent commentators and around the world. The recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development report was an independent commentary on the success of our reforms. The Labour party, however, is trying to appease its left wing to buy out clause IV and to give the health service to the unions at a cost of £1 billion, which will do nothing for patients. The Labour party will not get away with that and the Socialist Health Association is already condemning it for its cynical approach.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Secretary of State explain how the constant reorganisations have helped my constituent, 88-year-old Frances Grew, who, on Sunday afternoon went into Good Hope hospital in Sutton Coldfield, waited five hours for a bed and, at 9 pm, was admitted to the maternity ward, where she remains today? How have we reached such a sorry state where an 88-year-old lady has to be admitted to a maternity ward to obtain treatment?

Mrs. Bottomley: Of course there will be times when things go wrong, and they should be investigated, but Labour's approach is always scaremongering, divisiveness and appeasing the unions. The hon. Gentleman failed to say that, in the west midlands in the past five years, the number of hours for which junior doctors are contracted has fallen by 20 hours, that five years ago there were 8,000 people on the two-year waiting list and that west midlands will meet the nine-month target by next year. Health achievements in the west midlands in the past five years are truly remarkable, but they all stand in jeopardy because of the policies of the Labour party.

General Practitioner Targets

3. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners met their targets for immunisation and cancer screening (a) on the introduction of the general practitioner contract and (b) on the latest date for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: In 1990, 89 per cent. of general practitioners met targets for childhood immunisation and 86 per cent. for cancer screening. By April 1993, this had increased to 96 per cent. meeting childhood immunisation targets and 98 per cent. meeting cancer screening targets. This is an excellent achievement by family doctors, who are leading the way in improving the health of their patients.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that those figures are a tribute to the GP contract? Will he join me in congratulating doctors in west Norfolk who, under the contract, are delivering a superb service to their patients? As Labour voted against the contract, is it not time Labour gave doctors an apology?

Mr. Malone: When Labour Members are apologising, perhaps they will point out the fact that, in my hon. Friend's constituency, 100 per cent. of GPs are reaching the higher targets for childhood immunisation and cancer screening. That is an amazing achievement, particularly as we were told by the Labour party and the general medical services committee when we embarked on this exercise that it would be impossible to achieve. The exercise has exceeded all expectations.

Mr. Flynn: While the Government are congratulating themselves on the mounting number of drugs that are being prescribed, will they consider the submission from the victims of Septrin support group, which claims that 100 people have been killed by that drug and that thousands of others have suffered side effects? Will the Government make a sensible investigation into Septrin, or are they entirely in the control and pockets of the pharmaceutical industry?

Mr. Malone: No, the hon. Gentleman is, first, off the point and, secondly, entirely wrong. The consistent evaluation of drugs and their efficacy is not directly a day-to-day responsibility of Ministers. I am not congratulating myself or my ministerial colleagues on achieving those immunisation targets but recording my thanks and congratulations to practitioners and others involved in the service on those excellent results and on completing a measles vaccination campaign in record time over the winter period.

Community Care (Funding)

4. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives of the Association of County Councils to discuss the funding of community care; and if she will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I meet representatives of the Association of County Councils formally and informally on a variety of occasions, the last occasion having been last Monday. We discuss a variety of matters relating to English social services on such occasions.

Mr. Griffiths: Why does not the Minister listen to Lady Farrington, who chairs the association and who presented a list of 20 areas, from Bedfordshire to Wiltshire, that are chronically underfunded for community care? Does he not realise that the murder of Georgina Robinson showed what a failure community care has been and that it is time not for the new mental health Bill that the Minister promises but for a new Minister, a new Secretary of State and a new Government?

Mr. Bowis: I welcome the hon. and Scottish Member to questions about English health, but I shall not be able to do so for much longer if his party has its way. I certainly listen to the ACC. I also listen to the Audit Commission when it tells me that community care has got off to a good start, that some authorities have got into a financial muddle because of inadequate financial control and that others are playing politics with community care, spending money on administration, refusing to use the independent sector and then reducing services to people in need.

Sir George Gardiner: Will my hon. Friend comment on the situation in Surrey county council—a hung council—which appears to have run out of funds to support social services for the remainder of this year?

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right. I have seen the letter from Surrey county council to independent homes, which states:

"This must seem a strange letter to receive."

I endorse that comment. In its letter to councillors, it confesses that everyone took their eye off the budget ball, but, in the end, there were no excuses for Surrey social services.

I recall that, last year, Surrey social services received £93 million. For community and social services this year the figure is £108 million. We have announced £[illegible] million for next year, 17 per cent. extra this year, and another 11 per cent. next year. It is beyond my understanding how a county could get into such a muddle when it knew the figures for the current year in December 1993.

Mr. Hinchliffe: From his contacts with local authorities and discussions about community care, is the Minister aware of the extent to which councils are increasingly being asked to take on community care people who should be in hospital? Is he aware of unconscious people who are on drips being referred to councils for community care? Is he aware of people who are in a coma being referred to councils for community care? Is not the root of the crisis in community care the operation of the Government's market in health?

Mr. Bowis: I am aware that, this year, we are putting £4.6 billion into community care. I am aware that, for the coming year, as we have already announced, the allocation will be more than £5.1 billion. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have issued draft guidance and will shortly issue full guidance on continuing care, which will reinforce the message to the NHS that it has a responsibility for continuing medical and health care for people in need. I look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman's policies and those of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on community care and on continuing care—whether they agree with the views of the Commission on Social Justice, whether they have not yet made up their minds, or whether they are still waiting for Alastair Campbell to tell them.

Mr. Sims: Is not the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) confusing two different matters? Care in the community for the mentally ill has been running for a number of years. It is showing some shortcomings, as in some places provision in the community is not adequate, but there is also evidence that clinicians are releasing into the community some mentally ill patients with a history of violence who should not be released. The community care policy, which has been running only a relatively short time, gives local authorities responsibility for the elderly, children and the disabled. That policy has been generously funded and it is working well in most parts of the country, but some local authorities are financially incompetent.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. The amount of resources for mental health is not being criticised, although the use of the Mental Health Act 1983 is criticised on occasions. Implementation of the Government's widely welcomed and accepted policy is sometimes inadequate. That was the message of the Blom-Cooper inquiry, which called for a tightening of the Mental Health Act with regard to severely mentally ill people. That is precisely why, before too long, we shall introduce a Bill to implement supervised discharge.

"Working for Patients"

5. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the document "Working for Patients".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: "Working for Patients" has been a great success. Some 96 per cent. of NHS hospitals are now trusts, more than half of all eligible practices are now fundholding and, most important, the quality and quantity of patient care continue to improve.

Mrs. Mahon: Five years after the grossly misnamed "Working for Patients" document, we have the longest-ever waiting lists and the obscenity of people dying because there are no intensive care beds and services for the mentally ill are dangerously underprovided. Will the right hon. Lady make a brief statement on the document and its consequences, perhaps saying, "The Government got it wrong and my team and I resign"?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Lady will know that the length of time that people wait has just about halved, that every day we treat 3,000 more patients than we did at the time of "Working for Patients" and that the quality and quantity of care have improved. We have increased the number of hip operations by 24 per cent., of cataract operations by 44 per cent. and of cardiac operations by 66 per cent. Those are dramatic improvements in the health service.

When considering how to spend the extra £1.3 billion that we are putting into the NHS this year, health authorities will want to be sure that they have the balance right between intensive care, mental health services and reducing waiting times. They are pleased to have Conservatives in government as we provide extra resources for the health service—unlike the Labour party, which cut expenditure on the health service in real terms.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: As "Working for Patients" has led directly to reduced bureaucracy and improved care for patients, especially in my constituency of Norwich, North, will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming today's announcement in Norwich of approval for the outline business plan for the new district general hospital? It is good news. Way back in the past, there was a history of delay and endless prevarication. Under the new reforms, we now have approval, so will my right hon. Friend ensure that we get the new hospital as quickly as possible?

Mrs. Bottomley: Most certainly; I can do just that. Because we have been determined to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the health service, it is possible for patients to have a dividend. There can be a massive capital programme with a new project starting every eight days. That is what the Conservative party delivers. All that the Labour party delivers is the wish list of the trade unions, at a price of £1 billion, achieving nothing for patients and nothing for the NHS. It is just trying to keep the left wing happy. Of course, the greatest waiting list scandal in the NHS is the waiting list for a Labour party policy on the health service.

"The Health of the Nation"

6. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on "The Health of the Nation" objectives and progress.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: "The Health of the Nation" continues to enjoy the enthusiastic support of the clinical professions within the national health service and of outside bodies such as the World Health Organisation. Where latest information is available, it shows that for 19 out of the 23 targets we are moving in the right direction.

Dr. Wright: Does the right hon. Lady agree that the growing inequality in health between the deprived and the affluent parts of this country is making a nonsense of many of the key targets of "The Health of the Nation"? In particular, does she accept that the appalling rise in suicide rates among young men in deprived areas, which is an indictment of us all, is a direct result of the lack of jobs and the lack of hope? When will the Government understand that we can build a decent health service only if we build a decent society first?

Mrs. Bottomley: May I respond to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the increase in suicide? It is true that suicides have increased in virtually all comparable countries. More people take their own lives than are killed on roads. Our figures are about the average for similar countries. That is why it is such an important target in "The Health of the Nation" strategy. The hon. Gentleman is entirely misguided in that he does not recognise that the changed funding arrangements for the health service, and the distinction between purchasers and providers, mean that we can better focus on many of the difficulties that some areas face. I find it extraordinary that he supports a party that opposed the GP contract, which introduced for the first time deprivation payments for GPs in poorer regions. Perinatal and mortality rates have improved for all income groups and all social classes.

Mr. Streeter: Does my right hon. Friend believe it to be in the interests of patients for NHS hospitals to be put under the control of local Labour councillors and Labour party hacks—as the Labour party proposes—which even Bevan would not have contemplated?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right. Of course the battle that Herbert Morrison and Nye Bevan fought in 1948 is the debate now being fought in the Labour party. That shows its forward-thinking approach to health policies. It turns the clock back not to 1979, but to 1948 and it reopens the battle of that time. We must have a health service that is responsive to patients, that works with GPs and that focuses on health outcomes. The Government are achieving that, which is why we are delivering results that have exceeded even our own expectations at the time of the first patients charter.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the right hon. Lady agree that ensuring that men are as aware of health risks and health needs as women is a legitimate objective of an NHS strategy? Has she noted the alarming rate of deaths caused by prostatic cancer, which exceeds the rate of deaths by cervical cancer? Does she agree that the time has come to ask GPs to screen their male patients, as many screen their female patients, so that men's health can be greatly improved?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased that the hon. and learned Gentleman implicitly recognises the success of the cancer screening programmes. Cervical and breast cancer screening programmes have been extremely effective, with many women being screened. They build on the investment in primary care and show the importance in GP services of having, when possible, effective screening processes at primary care level. We shall consider the hon. and learned Gentleman's proposition carefully.

NHS Trusts

7. **Sir Peter Fry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the number of patients treated on the NHS has increased since the establishment of NHS trusts.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): The number of acute patients admitted to hospital between 1991, the year before the first trusts were established, and 1994 increased by 18 per cent. That represents an additional 3,000 patients treated each day.

Sir Peter Fry: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that in the Oxford-Anglian region, my own region, some 25 per cent. more patients have been treated by trusts and that some 50 per cent. more day cases have been treated? Does he, like me, find it difficult to understand why the Labour party wishes to sweep away trusts and thus deny the benefits of their success to our constituents?

Mr. Sackville: I agree with my hon. Friend. I congratulate his region on its exceptional performance. I agree that, under the sort of shower that the Labour party would bring to the health service, there is no way in which the number of patients treated could increase.

Mr. Pike: If the figures are so good, why do so many people find it necessary to pay for their first appointment to see a consultant, in the knowledge that, if they do not do so, they will have to wait months?

Mr. Sackville: Waiting times have come down. All districts are obliged to publish the length of the waiting list of each consultant for out-patient appointments. Waiting times for both in-patient and out-patient appointments are coming down. I should have thought that the Labour party would congratulate the NHS on that.

Dame Jill Knight: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only the figures should be noted? The fact is that more patients have been treated with infinitely more complicated and expensive operations, treatments and drugs than ever before in our history and that thousands of people are alive today who would have died from their condition even five or 10 years ago.

Mr. Sackville: My hon. Friend describes the successes of today's NHS in her own way.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Minister recognise that the figures that he gives are largely meaningless as they include so many elements of double counting because they count treatments and not patients? If the Minister really wants to look at patient episodes in that way, is he

aware of the substantial increase in the number of private patients treated in national health service hospitals? Does he recognise that most British people think that NHS patients should have priority in NHS hospitals?

Mr. Sackville: I am aware that the right hon. Lady is only just learning her job. She accuses us of double counting. The figures are now collected on the basis of finished consultant episodes because that is the best way to measure NHS activity. The difference between that figure and the old way of counting based on deaths and discharges is about 3 per cent. and all comparative figures reflect that.

NHS Expenditure

8. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of gross domestic product was spent on the national health service in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the percentage in 1978.

Mr. Malone: National health service spending in the United Kingdom as a whole has risen from 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1978-79 to an estimated 5.8 per cent. in 1994-95.

Sir David Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures show up the different priorities that Conservative and Labour Governments have for the national health service?

Mr. Malone: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. Not only that—they underpin the fact that there is increased activity and not merely increased spending. It is the improvement in patient health care that really counts for people in this country.

Ms Jowell: In view of the proportion of gross domestic product spent on the national health service and the importance of securing proper value for money for patients, does the Minister for Health accept that more rigorous monitoring is needed of the way in which NHS consultants who also undertake private practice divide their time between their NHS responsibilities and their private patients?

Mr. Malone: I am delighted that the hon. Lady now seems to support the Government's policy for ensuring that the management of clinicians should be devolved to a local level so that all these matters can be examined. I welcome her to this side. I had hoped that an Opposition Front-Bench Member might stand up and say what a Labour Government would spend as a proportion of gross domestic product, but on the vital matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) there is yet again a resounding silence from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I warmly welcome the figures, which clearly show the Government's commitment to the national health service. Does my hon. Friend accept that some high-tech sophisticated operations cannot be carried out in hospitals within the national health service in the United Kingdom? I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the case of Miss Alicia McCluckie in my constituency, who needed to go to New York for an operation to remove a brain tumour. Will my hon. Friend introduce a system to provide people in this country with a procedure whereby they can bring pressure to bear on the authorities to provide facilities for operations abroad when such treatment is not available in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Malone: e people come to Britain to take advantage of medical services here than travel abroad. However, it is true that some procedures are available abroad which have not been clinically proven in this country.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In 1978, Britain spent 8 per cent. less than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average on public health care. By 1991, the position had changed to 12 per cent. below the OECD average. Before I answer the Minister's questions, perhaps he will tell the House why the relative position has regressed under Conservative Government.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman said, "Before I answer the Minister's questions," but he is clearly not going to do so. Perhaps we shall get a commitment once the answer has been cleared, although I had thought that the hon. Gentleman was one of the Front-Bench spokesmen cleared to speak for his party.

On the OECD league tables, the hon. Gentleman is forgetting entirely that one is not comparing health systems that are the same. Some bring in expenditure from social services while others have an entirely different structure. He should study the OECD recommendations, which state that the British health care system is probably the most effective in the European Union and, more importantly, that we allocate funds throughout the country in a far fairer, more flexible and more sophisticated way than any other health service in Europe in order to meet deprivation and need.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most civilised part of Essex—Harlow—is delighted with the increased spending on the health service? We are delighted with our new NHS trust, our new computerised axial tomography scanner and our new magnetic resonance imaging scanner, and also with the £10 million spent by the Government on our accident and emergency facilities.

Madam Speaker: And I shall be delighted if the hon. Gentleman will ask a question.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you for that advice, Madam Speaker. Does my hon. Friend agree with me?

Mr. Malone: I had always thought that my hon. Friend was the most sophisticated and delightful part of Essex, but that opinion is perhaps not shared across the Floor of the House. I thoroughly agree with him. I was in Essex last week, opening a community health trust centre in Purfleet, which shows how excellent health care is in that county and how it is improving.

Care Beds (Elderly)

9. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the present level of provision of NHS continuing care beds for the elderly; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: District health authorities are responsible for making such assessment locally and for ensuring adequate provision.

Ms Coffey: Does the Minister agree that it is crucial to have national eligibility criteria for access to NHS

continuing care? It cannot be right for an elderly person in one part of the country to have to pay for health care which is free in another part of the country. How does the Minister intend to ensure that health authorities fulfil their financial obligations under the National Health Service Act 1977 and that the elderly have equal access to NHS care, irrespective of where they live?

Mr. Bowis: The answer lies partly in the continued generous funding for the national health service under this Government—£32 billion for England this year—partly in the fact that about 40 per cent. of spending on hospital and community health services goes on the 16 per cent. of people who are 65 and over and partly in the guidance that we are issuing to the health service to ensure that it continues to keep responsibility for the continuing health needs of the elderly and that it reviews, and if necessary re-provides, provision in that area. The hon. Lady must not ask me to take the place of the doctors, who ultimately decide the clinical needs of patients.

Mr. Garnier: If my hon. Friend wants to assess the provision of national health service care, would he like to visit the Coventry Road and St. Luke's hospitals in Market Harborough? Were he to do so, he would find fine examples of the success of the Government's policies and the good sense, management and operation of the Fosse health trust.

Mr. Bowis: I am sure that that is the case and that if I visited those hospitals I would see precisely what my hon. Friend describes—good quality care for people, irrespective of age, provided by the national health service within hospitals and the community.

Blood Donation

10. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra level of financing has been agreed by her Department for an advertising campaign by the National Blood Authority to encourage blood donation.

Mr. Sackville: National publicity to retain and recruit donors for the national blood service is funded by the Department of Health—in 1993-94, to the extent of £1.6 million. The budget for 1994-95 is £1.2 million. Smaller-scale local publicity is generally funded and organised by the National Blood Authority.

Ms Eagle: Does the Minister not realise that recent changes, which have threatened blood transfusion centres with closure, and the evidence that the National Blood Authority is selling blood products, are fatally undermining the contract with donors who freely give their blood? Does he not realise that a Government who believe in putting a price on everything, while knowing the value of nothing and flogging off everything that cannot be nailed down, will ruin our national blood service?

Mr. Sackville: The only thing which might have undermined blood donation has been the disgraceful campaign by the hon. Lady and her colleagues to frighten donors, but it has failed to do so. Blood stocks are now at about 15,000 units, and it is a tribute to our loyal donors that they have ignored the rubbish that they have heard from the hon. Lady and her colleagues.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My hon. Friend will be aware that I receive many letters from donors who fear that they may not have the opportunity that they currently enjoy to donate their blood at travelling units because of changes to the regional centres. Will he assure the House that, despite changes that may be made to regional centres, people will still be able to enjoy the benefits of attending those mobile units?

Mr. Sackville: Only a tiny proportion of blood collection takes place at those centres. The reorganisation is taking place because there is too much capacity in processing and testing. The savings that can be made will be available to improve donor support and recruitment of donors. I give that assurance to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Illsley: Does the Minister accept that there is a crisis within the national blood service? He has just quoted a figure of 15,000 units of blood. At yesterday's date—16 January—blood stock levels were 11,939 units, which is below both the figure that he quoted and the service's target figure of 20,000 units. The public are now unwilling to donate blood because the reorganisation proposals are unpopular and because of the increasing commercialisation of the national blood service. Will the Minister now reverse those reorganisation proposals?

Mr. Sackville: The latest figure happens to be 14,500 units. For the hon. Gentleman to talk about a crisis in the national blood service is highly irresponsible, as it is designed to frighten donors. Of all that has been said by the Opposition, that is the most disgraceful. It has nothing to do with the NHS but is about making political points.

Epilepsy

11. **Mrs. Gillan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been provided for research into epilepsy in the past financial year.

Mr. Bowis: The main channel is through the Medical Research Council, which spent a total of £472,000 during 1993-94 on research into epilepsy, an increase of 40 per cent. over the previous year.

Mrs. Gillan: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the increase of 40 per cent. in spending on research into epilepsy. Is he aware that the world's first scanner dedicated to treatment and research on epilepsy will be opened this spring at the National Society for Epilepsy in Chalfont St. Peter in my constituency? The society is delighted that the Secretary of State is to visit the scanner to see its progress. Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to thank the private donors who have raised £1.75 million to build that scanner, which will bring much help, treatment and relief to the many sufferers of epilepsy?

Mr. Bowis: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in the tribute that she pays to both the National Society for Epilepsy and the donors who have made the scanner possible. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is looking forward to opening it next week. I confirm the Government's real commitment to epilepsy. In recent months, not only did I open the Centre for Epilepsy and launch the Institute for Epileptology, but I have recently asked our officials to consider and come forward with plans for new initiatives in that area.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Minister ensure that research into epilepsy leads to action on behalf of people who have

epilepsy and that people who want to work in the national health service are not refused jobs because they are epileptic?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The work, including research, which we and the whole medical profession have been doing, is into educating general practitioners and the public. That includes employers, so that they accept people with epilepsy. It is to help people to live with the problem and also to encourage research. All those matters are on our agenda, which I am delighted to share with the hon. Gentleman.

Hospital Services (Northumberland)

12. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will visit Northumberland to discuss the financing of hospital services in the area.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State enjoyed her visit to Northumberland on 2 August 1994, but has no plans to visit again in the near future. I, however, would be happy to respond to an invitation from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Mr. Beith: Will the Minister follow up that kind offer and bring the Prime Minister with him? People in Northumberland are extremely baffled as to why, since the Secretary of State's visit, the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital trust has lost more than £1 million in its first year of operation. Can the Minister give a guarantee to back up the undertaking given by the regional chairman to the effect that, whatever the cause of that enormous cash shortfall, it will not impair hospital services in Berwick, Alnwick or Rothbury? Will the Minister take steps to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Sackville: I understand that last week the right hon. Gentleman and other parliamentary colleagues had a constructive meeting with the regional chairman at which they received that very assurance.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Winnick: Why has the Prime Minister refused to allow the Nolan committee to look into the way in which political parties are funded? Is it because that committee would soon discover the underhand and shabby way in which the Tory party collects a lot of its money and how knighthoods and peerages are given to many of those who make the largest donations to the Tory party? Surely it is disgraceful that the Conservative party should carry on in that manner in this day and age.

The Prime Minister: There is a disgrace in party funding. The hon. Gentleman is right—yes, indeed. The disgrace in party funding is the Labour party's dependence on trade unions, which buy direct influence over that party's votes. We have seen that many times in the past and we shall see it again with clause IV, as the old, unreconstructed Labour party comes to the rescue of the new Labour party.

Mr. Brooke: Does my right hon. Friend recall that after the country gave up paying danegeld the policy was resumed under King Ethelred the Unready?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend always adds a touch of erudition to these occasions. I suspect that he has in mind the precise point that I touched upon just a moment ago—he who pays the piper calls the tune, and we know who pays the Labour party.

Mr. Blair: On 10 January, the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's Question Time that he was as committed to maintaining the existing through-ticketing service on British Rail as I was. Tomorrow the House will have a chance to vote on a motion opposing any reduction in through ticketing. Will the Prime Minister therefore support that motion?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows what the Rail Regulator said last week. The regulator made the position perfectly clear: he is now considering the responses to his own consultation document. He said:

"Privatisation and restructuring of the railways are intended to improve service to customers and stimulate innovation. In looking at any new proposals to replace British Rail's current arrangements, I shall want to be satisfied that they are likely to achieve those objectives."

I agree entirely and I shall wait to see what proposals the regulator makes.

Mr. Blair: But the question is: what is the Prime Minister's own position? The Secretary of State for Transport said that any reduction in existing through-ticketing services was unacceptable. Will that therefore be the Government's position in the consultation, which the regulator has said may mean a significant reduction in service? Will the Government tell the regulator that that would be unacceptable? And if the regulator ignores the Prime Minister's view, what will the right hon. Gentleman do?

The Prime Minister: I set out the Government's position precisely, just a moment ago. If the right hon. Gentleman had listened to my first answer, he might not have asked his second question. If the right hon. Gentleman were, time after time, to hear the Government say precisely what would be the outcome of consultations before the consultation was completed, and when the consultation was being undertaken by a regulator, he would accuse us of abusing the position of the regulator and not listening to the consultation.

I repeat for the right hon. Gentleman: I shall want to be satisfied that the outcome of the consultation generally improves the service that is available to people on through ticketing and other matters. That is the purpose of privatisation. I am not satisfied at present with the service that British Rail has offered for many years, and I intend to see it improved. That is what privatisation will achieve.

Mr. Blair: Is it not the case, therefore, that last week the Prime Minister was saying that he was committed to maintaining the existing service and that now he will not say that he is committed to doing so? *[Interruption.]* He has just been given two chances to do so, and he has not said it.

Is not this the problem with privatisation? When the public see £700 million being spent up to now on privatisation, cuts in timetable, cuts in services, and now a possible cut in through ticketing, is it any wonder that they do not want British Rail broken up and sold off but want it maintained as a publicly owned, publicly accountable transport service?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has an unsuspected sense of humour. I had not imagined, after the turn and turn about in his transport policy on British Rail in the past few days, that he would have had the brass neck to suggest to us, incorrectly, that we had changed the position that we have taken on through ticketing.

Our position is precisely as we stated it at the beginning. We have made it perfectly clear what we expect at the end of the process. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, we have not changed our policy on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, as he has done through a range of his own spokesmen on the Front Bench, past and present, and his press spokesman.

Mr. Hicks: In view of the disappointing performances by our English test cricketers in recent years and the contribution that cricket makes to our national society, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is an urgent need to establish a cricket academy in this country and that it is a suitable project for consideration for funding by the Millennium Commission?

The Prime Minister: On the latter point, there is no reason why, if a suitable project were put forward, it could not be considered by the Millennium Commission or, indeed, I would think, in terms of the resources from the national lottery, by the Sports Council. As regards the general proposition, my hon. Friend knows my concern about team sports generally and my desire that they should be given much more importance in the school curriculum. We intend to pursue that.

Q2. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Darling: The Prime Minister will recall his great triumph last year when he installed Monsieur Santer as President of the European Commission. In the light of what Mr. Santer had to say today on the subject of European integration, does the Prime Minister still believe that Monsieur Santer is the right man for the right job at the right time, or is the right hon. Gentleman guilty of yet another gross error of judgment?

The Prime Minister: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has read all 34 pages of Mr. Santer's speech. *[Interruption.]* It is obvious from the hon. Gentleman's face that he has read the Press Association extract and nothing more. As for the best men for the job, we shall judge the new Commission by its performance and by its efficiency in carrying out the tasks assigned to it. As I have said before and I repeat now, I believe that the high tide of federalism in Europe is past, and I believe that that will be apparent in the forthcoming intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Marland: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in 1974 the Conservative Government banned the export of live animals for slaughter but the Labour Government of 1975 lifted the ban? How does my right hon. Friend think that that squares with the squawking that we hear from Opposition Members, given that the Opposition agriculture spokesman was a member of the Government who lifted that ban?

The Prime Minister: The straight answer to my hon. Friend is that I was not aware of the duplicity of the Opposition's position on that subject—although I suppose that in view of their position on so many other matters, I would have been wise to look back and see what their agriculture spokesman had done in the past. Surely the right approach for all people concerned about the welfare of animals is to raise standards of animal welfare across the European Union, which is what we are seeking to do. We lead from the front in negotiations on the subject and we intend to continue to do so to seek the best standards of animal welfare, not just in the United Kingdom where they are already better than anywhere else in the European Union, but right across the European Union.

Q3. **Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Chidgey: Is the Prime Minister aware that a recent survey by Eagle Star showed that there were more burglaries committed in Britain than in any other country in Europe? If so, will he now admit that the failure of his policies to tackle crime have placed this country not at the heart of Europe but on the far margins of lawlessness and disorder?

The Prime Minister: I sometimes wonder whether there is any piece of silliness that the Liberal party will not adopt to make a party point. Everyone in the House is concerned to see crime cut. The crime statistics, for the first time in not just two or three years but 30 to 40 years, are now beginning to fall. I have seen no support from the hon. Gentleman or his colleagues on the Liberal Benches for the vast range of measures that we have taken in recent years to combat and punish crime. When the hon. Gentleman comes into the Lobby to support the fight against crime I will listen to what he has to say at Prime Minister's Question Time on the subject of crime.

Q4. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister find time today to consider West Midlands Travel which, under Labour, was a sleepy nationalised industry but which, under the Tories, has been a privatised success story and is about to be floated on the stock market? Is it not good news that all the employees will receive free shares and the directors, who include the former Labour transport spokesman, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), will make large profits on their share options?

The Prime Minister: I suppose that that is another indication this week that it is best to be a former Labour transport spokesman than a current Labour transport spokesman. I welcome the flotation; I hope that it is a

great success and that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) does well out of it. The privatisation of the bus services has proved immensely successful for bus service users and will continue to do so—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members who shout "Rubbish" had better take up the matter with the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East.

Mr. Barnes: Why are the Government involved in a massive exercise to kill off the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill by introducing their own limited and restricted measure in the House ahead of discussions on that measure? The provision is required by the 10 per cent. of people in this country who suffer from disabilities and has massive support inside and outside the House.

The Prime Minister: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the Bill that he is seeking to dismiss. That "limited" Bill carries rights for disabled people when they are unfairly discriminated against in employment. It gives them the right to complain to an industrial tribunal when they feel that unlawful discrimination has occurred. It requires those providing goods and services to ensure that they are accessible and it provides for a conciliation service, a national disability council and measures to combat discrimination in transport and education sectors. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a limited Bill, I think that he has limited capacity to understand what is in the Government's legislation.

Q5. **Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Is my right hon. Friend aware how greatly he heartened most people in this country when he stated on television on 8 January that at the intergovernmental conference in 1996 he would not agree to any constitutional change which impacted on the sovereignty of this Parliament? Does that not contrast—with striking historical force—with the renewed admission by the Leader of the Opposition in Brussels on 10 January that a Labour Government would agree to further reductions in British parliamentary and national sovereignty?

The Prime Minister: I repeat that I believe that it would be a departure to make further constitutional changes. I was quite clear about that in my policy when I set it out a week or so ago.

I am rather surprised by what the Leader of the Opposition had to say about handing more powers to the European Parliament in view of the low opinion that he expressed recently of some Members of that Parliament.

BILL PRESENTED

Home Rule (Scotland)

Mr. Menzies Campbell, supported by Mr. Paddy Ashdown, Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Sir Russell Johnston, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. Robert Maclennan, Sir David Steel, Mr. James Wallace, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mrs. Ray Michie, presented a Bill to establish and entrench a Scottish Parliament elected by a system of proportional representation, with revenue-raising powers, to assume legislative authority on all matters of public policy relating to Scotland, under reservation of matters relating to defence, international and macro-economic affairs which shall remain the preserve of the United Kingdom Parliament; to provide for changes in the constitution and functions of certain public bodies; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon 27 January, and to be printed. [Bill 34.]

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not a long-established practice in the House that, when a Member raises an issue affecting another Member's constituency, he writes to tell that Member that he intends to raise it? As the town of West Bromwich also forms part of your constituency, do you not agree that it would have been common courtesy for the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) to inform my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), in order to give him the right of reply?

Madam Speaker: I make it quite clear that I am the Member for West Bromwich, West—the better part of West Bromwich. In all seriousness, I received a similar request yesterday which I am looking at and I hope to make a statement to the House fairly soon about those matters.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that the Nolan committee is carrying out an inquiry into conduct in public life and that many hon. Members are giving evidence to that committee. They wish to give evidence in some detail about the relationship between lobbying companies and Ministers of the Crown, and over a period, I have tabled a number of questions on that issue.

Before Christmas, I tabled a question to the President of the Board of Trade asking on how many occasions he or his departmental officials had met representatives of Messrs Ian Greer Associates. I was told that I could not be given that answer, for a reason that you will understand, Madam Speaker: Ministers regularly cite disproportionate cost as a reason for not answering questions.

The problem is that I know—as you do, Madam Speaker—that Nolan himself is in a position to secure that information from Government. Yet I, as a Member of Parliament, am not allowed to seek the information because Ministers will not answer questions. As the whole country is observing what is going on in the Nolan committee, will you express the view on this occasion that Ministers should answer questions, not on the detail of meetings but on when they met lobbying companies, thereby enabling Members of Parliament to speak responsibly about those matters when they appear before Nolan? If we are not in a position to do so, we shall find it difficult to substantiate our claim to the Nolan committee that it should consider the matter in some detail.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. If a question has been answered with the response that to obtain the information would cost too much, and later on that information is supplied to some other body, surely it would be a courtesy for the Government Department concerned to write to the hon. Member saying that the information is now available.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made a wise suggestion in that respect.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) began by saying that I know that hon. Members are giving evidence to the Nolan committee. I do not know who those Members are, but he has raised a serious point with me. Perhaps I can look at the responses that he has received and see whether I can be helpful in that respect.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In his reply to a question, the Prime Minister said that the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill contained provisions relating to education and transport. As that is not the case, would you consider inviting the Prime Minister to apologise for again misleading the House?

Madam Speaker: That is not a matter for me, but concerns political exchanges across the Floor of the House. The proceedings were perfectly in order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue the matter, he can find opportunities to do so, either with the Ministers concerned or with the Prime Minister himself.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Following the event at Downing street yesterday, which was clearly party political, and especially given the present financial condition of the Conservative party, I wonder whether Parliament can take a view on whether 10 Downing street is to be used for party political fund-raising events at any time in future.

Madam Speaker: There has been no breach of our procedures here, which are a matter for me. Proceedings which take place outside the House are not my concern.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

UNLICENSED TELEVISION SERVICES

That the Broadcasting (Unlicensed Television Services) Exemption Order 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3172) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

Building Societies (Joint Account Holders)

3.36 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to secure the rights of second-named account holders in Building Society joint accounts; and for connected purposes.

The Bill addresses the problem which arises whenever there is a takeover or merger by a building society which involves a bonus payout to members. It applies currently in the case of the takeover of the Cheltenham and Gloucester building society by Lloyd's bank. It will apply in respect of the proposed merger of the Halifax building society and the Leeds Permanent, and any others that may follow.

The combined effect of schedule 2(7) and section 100(9) of the Building Societies Act 1986, is that any distribution of bonus to savers who have investment accounts—that is, members who hold shares in the society—can be made only to a sole account holder or to the first-named person of a joint account, and in both cases only to those who have invested continuously for two years.

The requirement to have invested continuously for two years is a very wise provision, because it seeks to reward loyalty for long-term saving and not to reward those who open accounts in anticipation of a takeover and a windfall cash distribution.

The restriction to first-named joint account holders, however, discriminates against categories of saver who ought to be entitled to benefit. The most unfairly treated category of all is widows who have had a joint account with their husbands and whose husbands die during the qualifying period.

The husband's name may be deleted from the existing account, or the balance may be transferred to a new account in the widow's name only. Either way, the counting of the two-year qualifying period has to begin all over again. It makes no difference how many years previously the wife has contributed to the account: she gets no credit for it, because it is deemed to be in her husband's name.

The problem is well illustrated by my constituent Mrs. Wiltshire, of 52 Mayfield drive, Hucclecote, Gloucester. As long ago as 1964, she opened an account with the Cheltenham and Gloucester in her first married name of Mrs. Wellington. In 1966, her first husband having died, she remarried, and her account was amended to the name of Mr. and Mrs. Wiltshire.

Sadly, Mr. Wiltshire died in 1993, and the account was transferred back to Mrs. Wiltshire's sole name. She is therefore a continuous saver of more than 30 years' standing, but she does not qualify for a cash distribution under the C and G takeover, because she was not the first named account holder for two years prior to the qualifying date—in this case, 31 December 1994.

The same problem arises with newly marrieds. A single woman who has a building society investment account may on marriage choose to redesignate the account jointly in the name of her new husband and herself. By doing so, she loses the rights that may have accrued to her when the account was in her own name. Her new husband must begin the two-year qualifying period in his name alone. A similar disadvantage can arise in cases of divorce, when a woman must reopen an account in her name alone.

Those examples show that the 1986 Act unwittingly enshrined a degree of sex discrimination. It is virtually always the woman, whether a widow or newly wed, who suffers, because the normal convention in the English language is to designate an account Mr. and Mrs. To open an account using Mrs. and Mr. would be thought rather odd. Consequently, the woman is invariably the second-named account holder and cannot accrue any rights in relation to a two-year qualifying period while she remains the second-named person.

That problem has been much in the news recently, but it is not new. It was identified as early as 1988, when the Abbey National building society decided to convert to plc status. In making share allocations, the Abbey National found that it was precluded from conferring any benefit on second-named account holders. Six years later, that problem remains unresolved.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury is well aware of the problem, and I pay tribute to him for the time and trouble he has taken to consider possible solutions. He is currently engaged in a full review of building societies' powers, and hopes to present a range of measures in due course. The trouble is, as my hon. Friend pointed out in his letter to me of 14 December 1994, that he sees little possibility of bringing forward any legislation before 1996—and even then, the 1986 Act's takeover provisions are not his prime concern. My Bill singles out for earlier treatment one point that must surely be perceived as an injustice by whoever considers it.

The Bill does not attempt to tackle every related problem. For example, individuals who switch from a deposit account to a share account during the qualifying period also exclude themselves from any entitlement—but that is a more complex matter, which falls outside the Bill's scope.

In my opinion, the flaw in the 1986 Act was to assume that eligibility for bonus payments must be based exclusively on voting rights. Second and subsequent joint account holders were not given voting rights, because members could then have exercised multiple votes simply by adding extra names to joint accounts. That is why only one vote attaches to one account. However, exclusion from voting need not in every case be accompanied by exclusion from bonus entitlement. One bonus payout should attach to each account where either the first named account holder or a second or subsequent account holder meets the two-year qualifying period for continuous saving.

If my Bill becomes law, it will be for the Cheltenham and Gloucester to decide whether to take advantage of the legislation to benefit its members. A vote on the takeover's current terms is due at the end of March, and the two-year qualifying period ended on 31 December 1994. It would be open to the C and G to make the operative date later. It has already postponed it once, and could do so again. I hope that the society will so decide. In any event, the Bill protects against a similar problem arising in future takeovers.

The Bill does not attempt to change the two-year qualifying period or to give joint account holders more than their fair share or to alter voting rights. All it does, by two small amendments to the Building Societies Act,

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is give credit for the savings record of the second-named account holder, and by so doing, fairness and justice to thousands of people. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Douglas French, Mr. Matthew Carrington, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. Simon Coombs, Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. John Greenway, Mr. Nick Hawkins, Mr. Roger Knapman, Mr. Peter Luff, Mr. Paul Marland, Mr. John Townend and Mr. Nigel Waterson.

BUILDING SOCIETIES (JOINT ACCOUNT HOLDERS)

Mr. Douglas French accordingly presented a Bill to secure the rights of second-named account holders in Building Society joint accounts; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 3 February, and to be printed. [Bill 35.]

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

[Relevant document: The Third Report from the Treasury and Civil Service Committee on The 1994 Budget (House of Commons Paper No. 79).]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.45 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

All Finance Bills are vigorously debated, and I am sure that this Bill will be no exception, but I shall begin by commending to the House a procedural innovation affecting this year's debates, which may well improve the quality of our proceedings. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced in his business statement on Thursday, it would be proposed that the Standing Committee on this Bill would not be required to sit long into the evening or, indeed, into the night. In accordance with the spirit of the Jopling reforms, it is proposed that the Committee will sit in the mornings and afternoons, thus ending more than a century of a tradition of nocturnal sittings.

I take this chance to pay tribute to both sides of the usual channels and also to thank the Opposition for their co-operation in making the reform possible. It is a sensible modernisation of our antediluvian procedures, and it has been generally welcomed not only by hon. Members from all parties, but by the many outside bodies which like to attend the debates in Committee, including representatives of the professions, the unions, industry and the press. Apart from a few incorrigible Westminster night owls, almost everyone will be grateful for this new procedural move in favour of daylight debating time.

As the House knows, the Finance Bill is the annual legislation which enables the Government to complete their virtuous circle of sound public finances by aligning what goes out in public spending with what comes in in taxation. I am not at all sure that the Opposition understand that such a circle exists or that it needs to be virtuous, or, indeed, that there needs to be any sort of alignment between taxation, expenditure and borrowing.

The problem is not what the Opposition say. The deputy leader of the Labour party was flattering his team of Treasury spokesmen when he ticked them off recently in the middle of their shambolic disarray over VAT on education with the rebuke:

"I think we have been so long in opposition that we tend to be a little bit loose with our language."

Not for the first time, the deputy leader of the Labour party got it wrong. The real problem which we are likely to face in the course of debate on this Bill is not Labour's loose language, or even its loose purse-strings on expensive policy commitments such as new bureaucracies to handle the break-up of Britain, new quangos and the job-destroying minimum wage legislation. No, the real problem that the House and the country have with the Opposition on economic policy is the problem of their evasive silences.

Up to now, the shadow Treasury spokesmen have performed a passable imitation of four Trappist monks in a Harold Pinter play. Whenever they are asked

fundamental questions on vital economic policies—such as, do they think that the present levels of borrowing are too high or too low, do they think that the present levels of public expenditure are too high or too low, would they put taxes up or down, or at what figure will they set the minimum weekly wage that they have undertaken to introduce—consistently, answer comes there none. All we get are these uncomfortable Pinteresque silences, which are even being written up and noticed by the critics.

For example, this week's *Economist* published a perceptive article headlined "Labour's Profit Phobia" in which it asked:

"Is Labour really committed to a dynamic modern market economy?"

The report continued:

"But no one knows. There is considerable disagreement over economic policy within the Labour party, even among those who seem Mr. Blair's keenest supporters . . . there remain huge differences of opinion, for example, about the residual role of public ownership, about public spending and public borrowing and, most important, about profits and rewards."

I am delighted that *The Economist* and other parts of the media are waking up to Labour's yawning credibility gap on these issues. Conservative Members know where we stand on these important matters because one of the cardinal features of this Finance Bill is that it demonstrates our commitment to strengthening Britain's dynamic modern market economy. I shall refer to specific clauses that are dedicated to that purpose later in my speech.

However, let me focus for a moment on the phrase "dynamic modern market economy" because that phrase, and the commitment to it, came from the lips of no less a personage than the Leader of the Opposition during his ill-fated speech in Brussels on 10 January.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): Ill-fated?

Mr. Aitken: I hear a muttering of dissent from the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I called that speech "ill-fated" because, as has been well reported, the Leader of the Opposition's speech was torpedoed that same morning by the *Guardian* advertisement which attacked Labour's modernisation plans. That advertisement was placed by the majority group of 32 Labour MEPs who were later castigated by the Leader of the Opposition, with true brotherly charm, as "infantile incompetents".

Where was the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer in that divisive rumpus created by Labour's "infantile incompetents"? I have a fascinating revelation to make. The House will be interested to know that the source of the hostile *Guardian* advertisement was an office with a most intriguing address. The address was published in the advertisement, and it was 25 Church street, Inverkeithing, Fife. Guess whose office that was; guess whose office the anti-Blairite MEPs were using as their base from which to attack the Leader of the Opposition? The astonishing fact is that the anti-Blairite MEPs were using the shadow Chancellor's constituency office as their launch pad for that hostile *Guardian* advertisement.

Well, well, well; talk about getting wires crossed; talk about political schizophrenia and the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. We have always known that the Labour party is a divided church. Now we know that, even in the shadow Chancellor's own office, Labour is divided at 25 Church street.

I cannot think how the Opposition are going to manage their party, in respect of the Finance Bill, with that kind of unity. Imagine the scene when a new Labour well-wisher visits the office of the shadow Chancellor to offer advice on this admirable piece of legislation which promotes a dynamic modern market economy—after all, that is what the Leader of the Opposition wants—and what happens? He comes face to face with the old Labour's infantile incompetents tendency and the brothers who do not even approve of a market economy, and certainly do not want to see it modernised, dynamised or even endogenous-zone-ised.

My advice to the warring parties in "Blair Wars" is that they should at least compromise by declaring the Dunfermline, East constituency office a demilitarised zone. Joking apart—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Well, we like to have light and shade in such speeches. My colleagues are enjoying themselves. I am sorry that Opposition Members are so discomfited.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): While we are on the subject of joking, is my right hon. Friend certain that *The Guardian* had not stolen the writing paper?

Mr. Aitken: I am tempted to avoid those matters, as they are probably sub judice.

As I was saying, those schizophrenic splits and silences within the Opposition are quite rightly going to come under intense scrutiny during the debates on this Bill, as the whole purpose of our legislation is to consolidate and strengthen Britain's growing economic success story, underpinned as it is by the Government's resolute commitment to sound public finances.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Minister address the situation that is facing the charity organisations, whereby the excess which they must pay on VAT is in the region of £300 million a year, which is 10 per cent. above the income they receive? Does the right hon. Gentleman say that that is how the Government are building the economy, or does he agree that charities should be given special consideration?

Mr. Aitken: Charities have long been given special consideration under our taxation law, and they will continue to be so. The hon. Gentleman might be referring to a wholly erroneous report in one of the Sunday newspapers, which was completely misleading about that aspect of the Bill. It is such a detailed point that we had better keep it for discussion in Committee, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that he is going down a wrong road. The Government are all in favour of some special concessions remaining for the taxation of charities.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Does my right hon. Friend accept, however, that, notwithstanding the very valuable incentives that the Government have provided to charitable giving, charities face a burden of more than £300 million on irrecoverable VAT? Does he agree that, given that the Government are increasingly looking to charities to play a part in the provision of public services, it is important that the tax regime reflects coherent and consistent encouragement for charities? Therefore, before the measure is considered in Committee, will my right hon. Friend undertake to consider scope for a VAT refund scheme for charities?

Mr. Aitken: I know of my hon. Friend's great interest in and support for charities. I assure him that there is no

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sinister hidden agenda in the Bill somehow to do down charities in relation to tax. It is worth mentioning that charities already receive £1.4 billion of tax relief each year. Therefore, any criticism of anything in the Bill—I am sure that such matters will be debated fully in Committee—must be seen against that background. My hon. Friend's point must be seen in the clear perspective of the £1.4 billion of tax reliefs, but we will certainly consider it in Committee.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the grave danger of a Labour Government—if by some mischance Labour formed the Government of the day—removing charity status from schools, and of the problems that that would pose to Church schools and Church colleges, particularly those whose buildings were donated many centuries ago?

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. However, one of the temporary, at least, productive signs of the power struggle between old Labour and new Labour is that the sword of Damocles of VAT on Church schools and others—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Charities.

Mr. Aitken: It is all part of the package which was announced by the Labour education spokesman, and which was then smartly repudiated. He had that agenda in mind, but, if I can follow the gyrations and acrobatics in Labour policy making, it has been repudiated. However, that question is not for me, but for the Opposition. I hope that my hon. Friend's fears are misplaced.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Perhaps, in view of what my right hon. Friend has said, my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) should direct her inquiries to Inverkeithing rather than to Walworth road on this matter.

Mr. Aitken: Perhaps Church street looks after Church schools—we will see.

Sound public finances are the foundation of the Bill. I remind the House that, in his Budget statement, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced that we will reduce public expenditure by £28 billion over the next three years. Moreover, by a combination of encouraging economic growth and keeping such firm control on public expenditure, the Government will halve the public sector borrowing requirement between last year and next year from £45 billion to £22 billion. We project that we will nearly halve the PSBR again in 1996-97.

Opposition Members apparently do not approve of that, but my hon. Friends certainly do, and so do Britain's companies, Britain's inward investors and the international financial markets. The widespread approval of our policy of sound public finances and the decisions that flow from it have produced some remarkable results. I hope that all hon. Members will welcome the fact that the economy has performed way ahead of expectations over the past year.

The British economy has now been growing for two and a half years. Growth last year was more than 4 per cent., the fastest in the European Union, and exporters have led the way. Exports are up 13 per cent. on a year ago, and are at record levels. Some forecasters are making clear predictions that Britain's balance of payments may be in surplus this year and next. Certainly the House should welcome the fact that the current account is in surplus for the first time since 1987. After decades of decline, the United Kingdom's share of world trade in manufactured goods stabilised in the mid-1980s, and we are now selling more goods and services abroad than ever before.

Just one example of the remarkable success being achieved by British business is Japan—a nation to which we extend our heartfelt sympathies for the tragic earthquake it suffered today. On the general picture of British-Japanese business relations, many people would consider it remarkable that it appears that in recent months Britain has moved into current account surplus with Japan. That is surely a success story of which it is worth being proud.

In manufacturing, output is up by 5 per cent.; productivity is up by 6 per cent.—the fastest rise since April 1989—and unit wage costs are falling. Recent CBI surveys show that the manufacturing sector is expected to grow strongly.

It is also becoming widely recognised that Britain is one of the best places in the world to do business. That is certainly well recognised by our competitor countries, even if not by the Labour party. The United Kingdom has attracted the lion's share of inward investment to Europe, with more than 40 per cent. of United States and Japanese investment in the European Union coming here.

After America, Britain is now the world's second most popular inward investment destination. In 1993-94, almost 100,000 jobs were created or safeguarded by inward investment. Since 1988, overseas investors have backed Britain to the tune of £4 billion with projects such as the Nissan factory, which created more than 4,000 jobs in County Durham; Honda, which created 2,000 jobs in Swindon; Motorola, which created 250 jobs in East Kilbride; and Samsung, which created more than 3,000 jobs in Wynyard. Those developments are a real vote of confidence in the British economy and in British workers.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Before Budget No.1, the Scottish media told us that Scottish Office Ministers had made representations to the Treasury team to put off the second tranche of VAT on fuel. Those representations were obviously ignored by the Treasury team but subsequently accepted by the House. Before Budget No. 2, did Scottish Office Ministers make representations to put off the increases on fuel and whisky—two further anti-Scottish measures? Were they ignored again, or did they not bother to make any representations?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that Scottish Ministers fight their corner admirably, in Whitehall and everywhere else. Inevitably, such representations and communications with Ministers are not published; they are all part of the collegiate discussion. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Scottish Ministers fought their corner admirably at all stages of the Budget discussions.

The successes that I have listed have been due to two main keys. The first was the supply side reforms introduced by the Government over several years. The second, which is important for creating jobs and remaining competitive in world markets, is keeping a tight lid on inflation. Inflation is low—indeed, it is lower than

the European Union average. It has now been below 3 per cent. for 14 months running, something not seen since 1961, when the Leader of the Opposition was still receiving his private school education at a school free of VAT.

Against that background of low inflation, the present economic environment of a good performance by exporters, solid growth by industry, encouraging trends in investment and prudent stewardship of finances by Government, will definitely be strengthened by the Bill.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is an encouraging trend that the level of business investment last year was only 2 per cent.? Has he taken heed of what the Select Committee said in its report this week—that it does not really accept the Treasury forecast of an 11 per cent. increase in business investment in the year ahead? Is that not a problem area for the economy? Will not the position be made worse by the interest rate rises, in view of the capacity shortages in the economy?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman is in danger of being a doom-monger, and I shall tell him why. First, the latest data show that investment in plant and machinery in the third quarter of 1994 was up 5.3 per cent. on a year ago. Therefore, the latest figures suggest that the rate of investment is accelerating. The Treasury is forecasting a 10.75 per cent. growth in business investment in 1995, but that is a rather lower figure than the CBI forecast, which is that manufacturing investment in 1995 will rise by 11.25 per cent.

If the hon. Gentleman is not convinced by either of those forecasts, perhaps he would care to take a backward look and be reminded that, during a number of recent years, annual business investment growth has been running at more than 10 per cent. For example, it was 10.9 per cent. in 1984; 13.3 per cent. in 1987; 14.9 per cent. in 1988; and 11.3 per cent. in 1989. As the hon. Gentleman may realise, I was looking forward to an intervention on the pessimistic view of investment. A much more optimistic view exists. It should, and I hope will, prevail on the basis of the facts that I have given.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I am grateful to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury for giving way. He has been generous with his time, and I am grateful to him for that.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned investment projects into the United Kingdom, which of course includes Scotland, and the Government's so-called prudent stewardship of public finance. In his list of investment successes, he notably failed to mention Health Care International private hospital in Clydebank. The Secretary of State for Scotland poured millions of pounds into that failed project, yet he is still promising a further £4 million of public money to any private investor who steps in to try to rescue that project. How does that square with the Government's image of their stewardship of public finance?

Mr. Aitken: The very nature of investments is that they are sometimes risks. Not every investment works out as a tremendous success. Apparently, another foreign investor is thinking of investing in that hospital, which was a risk that was clearly misjudged at the time. Nevertheless, it is probably a good hospital building, and I hope that, under new ownership and new management, it will still provide a good service to the patients of Scotland.

I do not want to get into too much detail on any one investment project. I was giving the broad picture, which is extremely encouraging. I was anxious to turn to the contents of the Bill, which I can best summarise by concentrating on two major themes that emphasise the purpose of the Government's tax policies. The first is the encouragement of enterprise in employment, and the second, clearly linked to the first, is deregulation and simplification of our taxation system.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear in his Budget, the Government are especially keen to help small businesses to grow and to flourish. They represent the very lifeblood of Britain's commerce. It is a notable statistic that 96 per cent. of all firms employ fewer than 20 people, and that there are now 1 million more small businesses than there were when Labour left office in 1979. That represents a 50 per cent. increase in small businesses.

There has also been an excellent increase in self-employment, which has increased by 35 per cent. in the past 10 years. Those trends are steadily improving, as National Westminster bank's latest review of small business trends, published last week, clearly emphasises.

As a Government, we try to listen carefully to what small businesses tell us. We respond to their priority requests to help on matters such as cutting the cost of taking on new staff, easing the cost of business rates, raising new capital for expansion, cutting red tape and simplifying the tax system. All those requests have met a positive response in the Budget and the Bill.

For example, we have cut the cost of taking on new staff by our measures to reduce each of the lower rates of employer's national insurance contributions by 0.6 per cent. That will cut the cost of employing anyone who earns less than £205 a week. We have also announced a one-year holiday for employers' national insurance charges when an employer recruits as a new member of staff someone who has been unemployed for more than a year. On average, that will save employers more than £300 for each person they take on, at a total benefit to employers of £45 million a year.

Those two measures will boost output and help with the reduction of unemployment, which has fallen by more than 500,000 since its peak in December 1992, and which in recent months has been falling at the rate of more than 1,000 people coming off the unemployment register per day.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of small businesses, will he comment on the excise duty on video games, which affects several small businesses in my constituency? Many small business operators who have been to see me fully recognise that video games should fall within the tax net, but the proposals in the Bill will kill the goose that lays the golden egg, and prevent the operation of many video machines, which in a constituency such as Morecambe and Lunesdale provides many jobs for my constituents.

Mr. Aitken: From a constituency point of view, I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend's point because amusement machines seem to be concentrated not only in

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coastal locations such as Morecambe and Lunesdale but in Thanet. I have received some vigorous representations on the matter—*[Interruption.]* So, I can hear, have my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes). We shall have some interesting debates on the matter. It is not a new tax but an extension of an existing tax. We have broadened the boundaries. The amusement machine licence duty will broaden the tax base and protect long-term yield in an evolving market. Amusement machines without prizes will be taxed at a lower rate of duty. Payment by instalments will be available to ease cash flow. We will probably have a good debate in Committee on what I realise is for many of my hon. Friends a sensitive constituency issue.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Aitken: For the last time.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, on the sensitive issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Sir M. Lennox-Boyd), he and his right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury are prepared to consider representations by the trade body, the British Amusement Catering Trades Association, with which I am due to see my hon. Friend the Paymaster General with some of my hon. Friends next week?

Mr. Aitken: Yes. We will certainly listen carefully to representations from BACTA. I know that an appointment has already been made with my hon. Friend the Paymaster General. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) for his help in organising the meeting, which is of some importance. We will listen carefully to the representations made.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Aitken: I have just said that I have taken enough interventions. I must make progress.

We recognise that revaluation for business rates can cause uncertainty by imposing sudden additional costs on businesses. So we have eased that problem in the Budget by introducing a new transitional business rate relief scheme, at a cost of £605 million in 1995-96.

On the question of helping growing small businesses to raise capital, I draw the attention of the House to clauses 64 to 67 and schedules 14 to 16 of the Bill, which launch a new venture capital trust scheme to encourage the flow of new investment into small and growing businesses.

Mrs. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that, for many people in small businesses, the main means of raising finance is the equity on their home? One of the difficulties that many businesses face at present is that the further fall in house prices in the past year has meant that more of them than ever before have negative equity. Does he have any specific proposals to deal with that?

Mr. Aitken: I was dealing with helping businesses to raise capital. I was telling the House that we were introducing a new method of raising capital for small businesses. The venture capital scheme to which I referred will make it unnecessary for business people in future to mortgage parts of the equity on their home, which has always been a risky thing to do unless one was very confident of the business.

The venture capital trust scheme has been designed to fill the gap in the range of financing options available to growing companies. The VCTs will generate risk capital in the unquoted companies sector, while giving investors the security of a quoted pool vehicle. They are expected to lead to a substantial increase in investment. We estimate that a total of up to £2.5 billion could be raised by VCTs over the next three years. They will provide more funds where they are most needed: among dynamic, innovative and growing businesses.

I now turn to the easing of burdens on small businesses and tax simplification measures. I highlight the Budget reform which raised by one third the threshold below which small employers can account for PAYE and national insurance contributions quarterly rather than monthly. That means that 60 per cent. of all employers will now be able to make their PAYE payments quarterly.

I remind the House that we have introduced other deregulatory measures to cut red tape, including increasing the VAT registration threshold, which at the new level of £46,000 is now easily the highest in the European Union.

As for simplifying the tax system, the unwelcome size and weight of the Finance Bill highlights the strange paradox that simplification can be a complicated business, at least in terms of legislation. Some 70 pages of the Bill are devoted to a major reform and simplification of the tax system. Self-assessment will be of particular help to those affected—some 4 million self-employed taxpayers and an equivalent number of business taxpayers—by the relatively complicated tax returns.

Self-assessment is desirable because it removes unnecessary duplication of work. It helps taxpayers to pay the right bills at the right time. It leaves taxpayers with fewer clerical burdens, so that they have more time and energy to devote to their primary objective of creating wealth.

Self-assessment saves public money, simplifies collection arrangements and enables the Inland Revenue to pursue dishonest taxpayers more effectively. It is true that this year's self-assessment measures will place some new burdens on employers, but those are being kept to the minimum. The overall impact of self-assessment will be significantly to reduce business compliance costs. I hope that those measures will be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I hope that the Opposition will notice that this Finance Bill, like many of its predecessors, contains more than a dozen clauses designed to plug loopholes that may offer opportunities for tax avoidance. I hope that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) will be pleased by that fact, because in recent months he seems to have developed almost an unhealthy obsession with tax loopholes. He squawks and sound-bites on the subject with so much moral indignation that there are times when he brings to mind Disraeli's caustic comment on Gladstone:

"I don't mind him having the ace of trumps up his sleeve but I do wish he wouldn't claim that God had put it there."

My less celestial, but similar, complaint about the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is not that he wants to close tax loopholes but that he will keep pretending that

he and the Labour party have a divine right to claim it as a political card of their invention. That is complete nonsense.

The truth of the matter is that, in recent years, the Government have introduced more than 50 legislative measures to combat tax avoidance. This Finance Bill continues that regular process, and includes loophole-closing measures estimated to raise more than £1.5 billion in the next three years. I hope that that commitment knocks on the head the notion that the Inland Revenue or the Government are soft on unnecessary tax avoidance. We are not soft on tax avoidance, and a dozen clauses in the Bill are there to prove it.

Finally, on the two "clause fours", the Bill contains a clause 4 that deals with the denaturing of alcohol. That process has a remarkably similar bearing to what the new Islington elitists among the Opposition are up to—denaturing the Labour party. That denaturing of the old Labour party, over clause IV, is an esoteric exercise, which seems to be generating more heat than light, and is about as relevant to Britain's modern economy as a 19th-century ecclesiastical dispute about hymns, ancient and modern.

The Islington public relations spin doctors, however, are only too delighted to use the clause IV squabble as a cynical diversionary tactic to confuse the electorate with the illusion that something important is happening within the official Opposition.

The House and the country will not judge the Opposition and the Finance Bill by whether the natural Labour party or the denatured Labour party is making the most noise—that is Tweedledum or Tweedledee territory. The battle over whose new rattle is best may well continue with a vengeance every weekend in the Dunfermline office to which I referred, where the loyal shadow Chancellor has to battle it out with the disloyal leader of the Labour Members of the European Parliament who placed that advertisement in *The Guardian*, but that is all "Alice in Wonderland" stuff. It is absolutely irrelevant to Britain's dynamic modern market economy.

During the course of this Finance Bill, we want to find out whether the Opposition will break their Trappist vows and evasive silences on taxation, public expenditure, borrowing and the level of the planned minimum wage. If they do not do so, they will be exposed not merely as the denatured party, but as the discredited and devalued party that does not dare to reveal its true financial and economic policies, even during the intense scrutiny of a Finance Bill debate.

By contrast, our Finance Bill will put into effect the key measures in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget. It will strengthen the excellent economic performance that we are seeing in Britain today; it will help to encourage our enterprise culture, to simplify and deregulate the tax system and to clamp down on real tax avoidance. The Bill is full of sensible and prudent measures to sustain growth in a low-inflation, high-exporting Britain, and I commend it to the House.

4.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): First, I join the Chief Secretary in welcoming the innovation agreed by both sides of the House, of morning sittings of the Finance Bill Standing Committee. I assure him that that means that the Bill will have more scrutiny by the Opposition, not less. I shall not join him, however, in devoting my speech to matters other than the Finance Bill. It spoke volumes for what the Government have put in the Finance Bill that the Chief Secretary spoke for 20 full minutes before referring to the Bill. Even then, the remainder of what he said was spattered with the sparsest references to it. He spoke for eight minutes on the Bill and 24 or 25 minutes on other matters.

The Bill contains 348 pages, but does nothing to address the country's needs. It is as disappointing, damaging and divisive as the Budgets from which it results. Throughout its proceedings, the Opposition will contrast our approach of fairness and opportunity with the Government's addiction to privilege, vested interests and unfair taxation. The Bill is also rather a shambles, containing neither proposals to rescind the increase in VAT on fuel, nor measures to implement the mini-Budget of 8 December. We know that the Government will bring those forward by way of amendments later, but what a way to carry on—major Budget changes spatchcocked into the Bill at the last minute, when the public, interested parties and hon. Members will have less than adequate time to consider them and no opportunity to amend them in Committee.

The Bill will compound the Government's record of broken promises and incompetence. It will do no good to the vast majority of people and nothing to improve the position described by the vice-chairman of the Conservative party—no less—when he said in the Maples report:

"the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer."

That is the reality that people are experiencing, and it will get worse as living standards fall under the impact of the further tax increases that will hit people this April and of the rise in housing costs, which the Bill would make worse, and as people are hit by the consequences of centrally imposed cuts in local council services.

Mr. Giles Brandreth (City of Chester): The hon. Gentleman has touched on tax increases. As it would be fruitless to ask him what tax increases he has in mind, will he concentrate his mind on public sector borrowing? Does he endorse the Government's aim of reducing the public sector borrowing requirement to £5 billion by 1997-98? What does he judge is the correct level of public borrowing in the term covered by the Bill?

Mr. Smith: We shall take no lectures from a party that not only broke all its election promises on tax, but built up record levels of public borrowing, for which the country will pay dear over the next few years.

Instead of dealing with people's worries and doing something about them, Conservative Members just claim that everything the Government do makes things better. They pump out propaganda that shows the same scrupulous regard for the truth as the promises that they made to cut taxes at the previous general election. We have the 100 facts from the chairman of the Conservative party, which I presume the Chief Secretary must have checked as they contain such wonders of wishful thinking as fact 27:

"The PSBR is forecast to fall from £21.5 million in 1995/96"—

chance would be a fine thing—and the claim in fact 96 that spending on the Welsh language is "now over £7.5 billion." That will come as news to my hon. Friends in Wales.

[Mr. Smith]

Doubtless in the same spirit, the chairman said in his news release:

"for Britain, good news is all about us, if only we care to look."

Once he has finished explaining that to his vice-chairman, Mr. Maples, who thinks that people are getting poorer, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) may find time to explain to the country the fact that living standards are falling by 4 per cent. this year; this year, direct taxes on a typical family will go up by £6.44 a week; indirect taxes will go up by £2.72 a week; and interest on the national debt will be a staggering £36 billion more in the next five years compared with the past five years. With killer facts such as that, the Conservative party chairman has nothing to boast about. He should be apologising to people for broken promises and for how badly the Government have let Britain down.

Ministers should apologise today for bringing forward a Bill that does nothing for investment, jobs and fairness. In their news release on the publication of the Bill, the Government heralded venture capital trusts as

" a major theme of the Finance Bill".

They said that they would provide

"vital extra funds for investment."

The Chief Secretary said in his speech that that would ensure that funds went where they were most needed. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the proposal will create any new money for investment—there is every expectation that it will divert savings from other quarters.

It is revealing that the financial and investment press has focused rather more on the tax avoidance opportunities and rather less, indeed hardly at all, on new funds for investment. The magazine, *Small Company Investor*, for example, reports:

"Our bet is that there will be an avalanche of lower-risk property-backed schemes taking money away from entrepreneurial small companies. Think again Chancellor."

I fear that that message will fall on stony ground and will be unseen by the Chancellor and his colleagues, because reading that magazine and criticisms of the Government's proposals in other publications prompted me to ask to which investment publications the Treasury subscribes. I received an interesting list, which included something called "Baking Technology", which I presume is used for cooking the books.

Given how often the Government make extravagant claims about the help that they have given to small businesses and bearing in mind the fact that more than 750,000 of them have gone bust in the past five years, one might have thought that the Government would subscribe to *Small Company Investor*. Between now and the Committee proceedings, the Government should make a wise investment in a subscription for that magazine and obtain some back copies of it. They would then discover that it contains headlines such as:

"Life is just a bowl of tax cherries. Will you need to pay capital gains tax again? Maybe not."

There is no doubt that venture capital trusts are a massive tax break. They provide tax breaks when the money goes in through relief from income and capital gains tax; tax breaks when the money is in trusts when dividend and capital gains are not taxed and tax relief when the money comes out with relief on the capital gains.

Property-backed companies, which are trading for tax purposes, fall within the Bill's provisions, which means that the Bill risks replicating the worst features of the business expansion scheme. There would be nothing to stop a venture capital trust being designed round the opportunities for a millionaire's tax shelters, such as that marketed by Johnson Fry Holdings, which offers the opportunity to shelter capital gains of up to £100,000 a year, with the indefinite benefit of the interest gained on the tax liability thereby deferred.

The Opposition do not believe that the stated purpose behind the investment schemes is all bad; we want to see investment encouraged. We have argued for particular encouragement for investment in research and development. Our concern, however, is that the schemes presented in the Bill offer legion opportunities for abuse. The Government will claim that they have created provisions to reduce those opportunities, but they have succeeded rather more in creating legislative complexity than they have in inhibiting avoidance. It would be a triumph of hope over experience to expect that things will not be worse than even I have described once the full ingenuity of the tax avoidance industry gets to work.

The same goes for the provisions to extend the enterprise investment scheme and roll-over relief. The memorable words of the December 1994 issue of "BESt Investment Tax Shelter Service"—another publication that I would commend to Ministers—were:

"Another detail change (for which we had been lobbying) sees the much disliked 'property test' abolished for EIS and Re-investment Relief companies. This will have the effect of . . . reducing the costs of creating artificial structures to get around the old provisions."

There could be no clearer confirmation that the Government are opening up further opportunities for abuse of low-risk property-backed schemes, which even they had to recognise and reverse following their abuse in the business expansion scheme.

What is more, the tax avoidance culture for super-rich and very well-advised people makes a sickening contrast with the increases in tax bills—£800 extra a year—for a typical family, compared with 1992, when the Prime Minister promised tax cuts year on year. It is obvious, yet again, that, with the Government, there is one rule for the few and another rule for the many; one rule for a person with £100,000 of capital gains a year to shelter, and another for the waged or salaried employee, struggling to pay a mortgage and fearful of unemployment.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Gentleman is missing one rather important point—that a lot of people who make equity investments lose a lot of money. The record showed that many people went into the BES for tax reasons and lost a great deal of money. As a considerable risk is involved, surely it is right that the Treasury should offer some tax incentives for people to take a risk. That is the important point, is it not?

Mr. Smith: It is a long time since I heard anything as extraordinary as the idea that the mass of ordinary taxpayers should subsidise wealthy people to put their money into schemes that are often safe, one-way bets without risk.

The Bill also threatens investment by its proposals on deep discount and qualifying index securities. Although we understand that the Government are thereby trying to prevent loans being structured with the sole intention of deferring or avoiding tax, we are worried about the serious, possibly unanticipated, effects that that would have, especially on non-profit-making organisations such as housing associations and universities.

Those organisations have found those instruments for borrowing especially advantageous because they have been available to them on more favourable terms. It would cause special difficulties for them if the goalposts were to be moved part of the way through the game, so that those organisations were now confronted by greater borrowing costs on existing loans. That could mean larger rents for housing association tenants and budget difficulties for universities—perhaps even for health trusts, if they also have used those instruments.

The Finance Bill changes would be especially onerous on institutions that had already incurred, before 29 November, considerable fees in preparing a qualifying index security for issue but had not yet issued the debt. The university of Portsmouth has been cited to me as an example, and I am sure that we shall need to discuss many others in the detailed proceedings on the Bill.

Options should be explored to avoid those difficulties. First, the taxation of existing arrangements on the same basis as was expected when the transaction was initially executed—which natural justice and fairness would dictate—has much to commend it. Secondly, tax benefits on future arrangements could be restricted to approved borrowers, such as the non-profit-making organisations, including housing associations and universities, to which I referred. Such options could deal with the potential injustice caused by the increased cost that many borrowers will bear because the Conservative Government propose to remove—in effect, retrospectively—tax incentives that the Conservatives themselves created in 1984 and 1989.

What I have just said about deep discount securities emphasises the importance of what I said earlier about venture capital trusts. The Government always appear to be taken by surprise when, having created a tax break, they subsequently find people taking advantage of it. Rather than launching different schemes to capture a few headlines each year only to be confronted with the need to unscramble the mess later, it would be much better to take a considered, long-term and properly consultative approach to encouraging investment and saving. We need properly thought out action, not gimmicks.

Just as the Bill is wholly inadequate on investment, it abjectly fails to tackle unemployment. The increases in beer and spirit duty that the Government propose to introduce under the mini-Budget resolutions will cost jobs. We share the concern expressed by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which said in its Budget report published yesterday:

"We recommended in our Report on cross-border shopping that the Chancellor should take full account of the potential disadvantages of any widening in the level of duties between the UK and the rest of the European Union, and the encouragement this might give to increased cross-border purchases. We are concerned that this recommendation may not have been heeded and that UK industry could be damaged as a result."

Our fear and that of many in the brewing, pub, retailing and distribution industries is that those excise duty increases, further widening the cross-channel differential, will prove a jobs killer. What is more, the unemployed will look in vain for any measures in the Bill that will effectively generate jobs. We shall argue for a proper rebate for employers recruiting the long-term unemployed. We shall put the case for phased release of local authority capital receipts, for a small business expansion scheme, for measures to increase the availability of affordable child care and for job-generating energy efficiency schemes.

We shall take every opportunity to oppose the vindictive proposal to withdraw mortgage help for the unemployed. The unemployed need jobs and training; they need help to get them back to work, not punishment that threatens to turf them out on the streets. We argue for fairness where the Government are entrenching a Britain of double standards and deepening inequality. We want action on boardroom excesses, on profiteering by the privatised utilities and on excessive bank charges.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. When he talks about chucking people out on to the streets and turfing them out of jobs, does not he realise that the Labour party's adherence to the social chapter will do exactly that? I speak not just as a Member of Parliament, but as an employer.

Mr. Smith: The social chapter—long overdue for application in this country—would extend to British employees rights that are increasingly taken for granted across the rest of the European Union. Why should people in this country suffer due to the obsessions of some Conservative Members, not all of them—I recall the speech that the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) made last week when he said that the minimum wage should apply as a matter of justice and that we should sign the social chapter. We are talking about basic rights and protecting people. The Government want to remove even the basic protection that remains after their wanton vandalism of our welfare state over the past 15 years.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for indulging me yet again. If what he says is true, what does he have to say to the people in Scarborough with jobs at a large company in my constituency, which has just doubled its production line in Scarborough rather than build a factory in France because of the social chapter there? Jobs come here because of our lack of a social chapter and because it costs so much to employ people on the continent. That is the reason why we are the centre for Japanese and American investment—not the hon. Gentleman's policies.

Mr. Smith: We welcome inward investment, including that mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. In many such cases, the executives running those companies have stated on the record that they would be happy to comply with the provisions of the social chapter. What worries inward investors is not that we may be applying social protection in the United Kingdom in common with our European partners, but that Conservative Members' antics involve divorcing Britain from the European Union, thereby cutting us off from the business opportunities that the single market presents.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): The hon. Gentleman says that he is interested in inward investment. We receive much inward investment because we have

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

among the lowest rates of corporate tax in Europe. What would the hon. Gentleman say, therefore, to someone such as Howard Davies, the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, who analysed the Labour party's plans to close so-called "loopholes" in corporate tax only a year ago and found that they would increase the rate of corporate tax by no less than 25 per cent. or £3.6 billion every year? How does the hon. Gentleman expect people to invest in this country when faced with that scenario?

Mr. Smith: Howard Davies subsequently accepted that that was not the case, and I have not heard him comment about our proposals in the way that the hon. Gentleman implies.

We shall oppose two miserable and mean-minded measures in the Finance Bill. There can be no justification for the Government freezing the modest blind person's allowance for the third time in four years, especially when so many blind people have to get by on such low incomes. We also challenge the unfairness of the Bill not extending to those holding pensions in occupational schemes and retirement annuity contracts the flexibility on purchasing annuities that the Bill introduces for personal pensions. There is no good reason to discriminate against a million pensioners in that way.

As well as the Bill's unfairness, we shall also expose its absurdities and the damage that will result from the imposition of the new vehicle excise duties and registration regime. It will impose administrative burdens on emergency services and load new charges on essential service vehicles such as snow ploughs, gritters, and street-cleaning and street-lighting lorries. The new charges will affect tractors and even mowing machines. Cars on display in second-hand car dealerships will be taxed—I am sure that Conservative Members will have something to say about that.

I look forward to hearing Ministers explain how that is all part of their deregulation initiative to lift the burdens of red tape from business. I also look forward to their explaining the operation of the Bill's provisions for self-assessment in taxation. I wish that I shared the Chief Secretary's optimism that they will simplify matters. I note that he conceded that the Bill's provisions will impose additional burdens on employers. The proposal, which has a certain amount to commend it in theory, is threatened by the incomprehensibility of its implementation. After all, self-assessment is being introduced into a tax system that the Government have made increasingly complex in recent years. A crude measure of that is the number of pages of legislation on income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax, which has more than doubled since 1982.

There is no dodging the fact that self-assessment involves a big transfer of responsibility for compliance from the Inland Revenue to the taxpayer. Judging from the Bill's complexity, many taxpayers who at present are able to manage their tax affairs without professional advice will need to employ such advice as a result of the operation of the Bill, and that advice does not come cheaply. Whereas people previously had to state just their income and capital gains, they will now have to have sufficient knowledge of the tax rules to calculate their own liability. That will prove very worrying for many people—especially elderly taxpayers—given their legal obligation to get their calculations right.

We shall pursue how the provisions can be made to work in a fair and straightforward fashion and what help and advice will be available to taxpayers. The Government should think very seriously about the proposal because taxpayers face a double burden—insult on top of injury. Not only will they be charged more tax—in breach of the Conservatives' election promises—but they will face more worry in calculating their liability.

There is a lot wrong with the Finance Bill. Like the Budgets that it implements, it is a wasted opportunity. In place of an incompetent Government's inadequate Bill, Labour and the country want to see action for jobs, action for investment, and partnership—the only route to success for a modern economy. Where there is unfairness, division and disillusion, Britain needs investment, training, jobs, partnership and fairness: real hope for the future.

In voting against the Bill tonight and in the policies and action for which we are campaigning up and down the country, we shall demonstrate how Labour speaks for Britain and brings closer the renewal of government, which Britain needs so desperately.

4.45 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) made a characteristically vigorous speech, but, perhaps understandably, he declined to mention the most startling fact about the British economy—the unprecedentedly favourable conjuncture of economic circumstances.

Last year, growth was slightly more than 4 per cent., inflation was 2 per cent. and unemployment declined by 500,000, compared with the trough of the recession two years ago. Productivity and investment were extremely buoyant and the increase in exports generated much of last year's growth. As a result, at a time when our economy is growing much faster than those of most of our trading partners, our balance of payments has improved substantially—in fact, we now have a balance of payments equilibrium.

That combination of factors is quite unprecedented in the lifetime of Members of this Parliament. It raises two obvious questions: first, what caused that benign combination and what was the role of Government policy in it and, secondly, how can it be sustained?

Inflation has been a disease of the British economy for the past 30 years. I think that there is general agreement, nationally and internationally, that we could not have succeeded in mastering inflation in the time scale and to the extent to which that has been achieved if we had not been in the exchange rate mechanism. The Prime Minister took the extremely brave decision to join when he was Chancellor in the autumn of 1990. It was a deliberate Government decision that has certainly brought its rewards. Of course, as often happens when one has to cure a serious disease, the medicine is not always very palatable, but it was a necessary decision and it has proved extremely effective.

Relaxation of monetary policy and the reduction of interest rates made possible by our membership of the ERM—indeed, it began at the moment when we joined the ERM and continued from autumn 1990 until the early

part of last year—have resulted in the revival in economic growth. Some economists believe that, as a general rule, there is a gap of 18 to 24 months between changes in monetary policy and those changes impacting on output. Remarkably, that rule seems to have applied perfectly in this instance: output began to revive and we came out of recession in spring 1992.

Considerable fiscal expansion ran parallel with that relaxation of monetary policy and reduction in interest rates, which contributed to re-establishing the growth of the British economy. Both policies were clearly deliberate, conscious Government actions, and they have produced results.

It is wrong, however, to look at the growth or success of any economy purely from the demand side. We all know—as we have learnt in Britain through painful experience and as the entire world has learnt in many different contexts—that it is no use increasing demand through monetary or fiscal measures if the supply side cannot respond and produce the new products, which are called for as fashions and the patterns of demand change, effectively and at a competitive cost. If the supply side cannot respond to an increase in demand, that increase in demand will simply create inflation or a massive increase in imports as the rest of world meets it, resulting in rapid deterioration in the balance of payments.

We have experienced exactly the opposite: a substantial increase in demand with falling inflation and a steadily improving balance of payments. That demonstrates that there has been a fundamental change in the British economy, which is a result of the supply side reforms that the Government have undertaken since the beginning of the 1980s, embracing the improvement in the labour market, the reduction of trade union monopolies and the diminution in the obstacles to productivity growth that beset British industry for so long, increasing flexibility, mobility of capital and labour and increased dynamism and professionalism in management.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): My hon. Friend mentioned our exports performance and the tremendous improvements in the current account. How much of that would he attribute to the more competitive level of sterling following our departure from the exchange rate mechanism?

Mr. Davies: It is quite clear that devaluation has improved our competitiveness, but much more striking—as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware—is the fact that our turnaround in output and emergence from the recession predated the end of sterling's membership of the ERM and black Wednesday by some six months. The devaluation was clearly not the basis of the revival in output.

One can say, however—and perhaps my hon. Friend was thinking of this—that the devaluation posed considerable dangers. At a time of rising demand, falling interest rates and rising Government expenditure, to add on to that already expansive formula a considerable devaluation of about 15 per cent. against the weighted average of currencies with which we deal could have taken the economy over the edge into inflation.

My hon. Friend brings me to my second point—where we stand on inflation. The Government sensibly and wisely responded to the devaluation with a considerable change in fiscal policy by reducing public expenditure, or at least the growth of public expenditure, and by raising new tax revenues and reducing Government borrowing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) and I supported the Government in that fiscal retrenchment and in the difficult and painful decisions that have had to be taken on taxation, as we all know so well. We defended the Government because we knew that those measures were necessary and that, if they had not been taken, there would have been a danger of increased inflation, particularly because of the devaluation to which my hon. Friend rightly refers.

The second great question I want to raise is the one that most concerns our constituents: whether such a splendid state of affairs and encouraging series of developments can be sustained. One might look again at two aspects: demand and growth on one side and inflation on the other, and we know how interdependent they are. If we run into inflation, we shall find ourselves back in the stop-go cycle that has beset us so disastrously in the past.

People are not primarily concerned with growth at present. The economy has been extremely buoyant, but it cannot continue to grow at a rate of 4 per cent. per annum, as it has in the past 12 months.

In the Red Book, the Government predict that from 1996-97 onwards the rate of growth will be 2.75 per cent. If the Government consider that 2.75 per cent. is the sustainable non-inflationary growth rate of the British economy, that represents a considerable increase in the secular sustainable growth rate of the British economy in the past. It is an encouraging picture and it reflects the supply-side reforms to which I have referred, the buoyancy of investment and the even greater buoyancy of business investment predicted for next year.

The question is how to come down gradually and gently into a sustainable rate of growth. The Government have been extremely sensible and prudent in their fiscal and monetary policy. We have had not only the fiscal retrenchment, to which I referred and which is extremely welcome, but a change in monetary policy since last autumn, when interest rates began to rise again. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has had to take difficult decisions. There is always pressure from politicians, from the media, from constituents, from industry and from borrowers, who say interest rates should be lower. We hear that unfailingly from Opposition Members, particularly from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) who, ever since I have been in the House, has never said anything about monetary policy except that interest rates should be lower, whatever the concatenation of circumstances and whatever the results of that policy might have been.

We know that it would have been disastrous to have said simply that interest rates should always be low. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has sensibly decided that the time has come, when the economy is buoyant and without waiting for inflation to manifest itself, to take some early measures to trim demand to a sound and sustainable level. It is striking that he has intervened to increase interest rates at an earlier stage in the cycle than ever before, and I commend him for that.

My right hon. and learned Friend has done something else, the significance of which has not been appreciated as much as it should have been. He has taken an extremely brave measure in deciding that the minutes of his monthly meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England

[Mr. Davies]

should be published six weeks later. There is a precedent for that in the open market committee of the Federal Reserve bank in the United States, but that is a committee of an independent central bank.

It is quite unprecedented for politicians voluntarily to decide to put such constraints on their monetary policy as will inevitably follow from publishing those minutes. No Government could easily sustain their position when those minutes were published six weeks later and it was revealed that the Governor had said that the Government's inflationary targets could not be met unless interest rates were put up and the Chancellor had replied, "No, I shall not put them up; I cannot take your advice." Complete chaos and collapse would follow in all the financial markets—in the sterling foreign exchange market, in the money markets and in the gilt market—and that would prove very expensive.

The Chancellor has placed a discipline on himself quite voluntarily. He has decided to forgo—and those of us who have sufficient confidence in him and in the Government know that they would not have wanted to use it in practice—even the theoretical possibility for the Government to manipulate monetary policy for electoral or political purposes.

That is an extremely important self-denying ordinance. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) mutters into his beard—well might he do so. He is probably saying what a confounded thing that is. If, by any dreadful mishap, Labour is returned to power, it would immediately want to go for broke, cut interest rates and spend money like it was going out of fashion, but a possible constraint, on even a future Labour Government, has now been built into the system.

It is unprecedented for a Government to impose such a self-denying ordinance on themselves, but it is good monetary policy since it increases its credibility. It makes it clear to the financial markets, borrowers, savers and investors in the economy that British monetary policy will not be manipulated for short-term political purposes. That will create greater confidence in the economy and will positively affect the cost of capital, investment intentions, willingness to buy gilts and—other things being equal—the yield on gilts and the cost of funding the national debt, which we all know is too high and is a matter of concern.

That self-denying ordinance should also reduce the British economy's volatility. If monetary policy is more credible and then is altered in one direction or another, everybody will believe that the new policy will be stuck to and will not be pushed off course by political pressure. That can only be good, because adjustments of a lesser amplitude will then be needed to effect a given change in expectations and behaviour. We will achieve at least some of the benefits that countries with independent central banks have enjoyed as a consequence of the greater credibility with which they conduct and pursue sustained and consistent monetary policy.

I give particular credit to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for that. It gives us great confidence that our achievement of bringing down inflation is not a one-off and temporary but can be sustained. Of course this Parliament has experienced difficulties, but when future generations look back on it they may say that one of its great achievements was to bring to an end an era in which the economy was blighted by the disease of inflation and that inflation then ceased to be a competitive handicap on the British economy.

The Finance Bill is, as always, far too long. A number of right hon. and hon. Members and others outside have commented that if parliamentary draftsmen cannot produce a more lucid and succinct Bill, we ought at least to market-test, to see whether outside firms of lawyers could not do a better job. Those comments have clearly not been taken to heart, but one hopes, as with many drips of water on a stone, that one will eventually have some impact. I hope that I will be forgiven if I continue to make that point.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the complexity of the tax system—and consequently of the Finance Bill—makes an increasingly strong case for an annual taxes management Bill in addition to the Finance Bill? A taxes management Bill would be considered by a Committee that could take expert outside evidence and examine tax proposals in considerable detail, separately from the political matters incorporated in the Finance Bill.

Mr. Davies: I much appreciate my hon. Friend's expertise and I have the greatest regard for it. He makes a good point extremely well, but I hesitate because the effect of two Standing Committees considering the Bill would be that the technical Committee would tend to be marginalised and would not make quite the impact on opinion or on the formation of tax law that is desirable. The distinction between the Bill's technical and political aspects is not always as clear as some people think. What are sometimes seen as technical issues are invariably couched in incomprehensible verbiage, as in recent Finance Bills, but they nevertheless can have considerable economic impact on businesses, consumers, savers and investors. The general and political impact might be missed if so-called technical matters were brushed into a separate Committee.

I see great merit in my hon. Friend's proposal that the Committee considering the Finance Bill should take evidence from outsiders before detailed debate. That principle should generally be adopted, as I have said in other contexts. Before any major Bill is taken through the House, a Special Standing Committee should take evidence. The constitutional and procedural procedure that would enable it to do so already exists but, regrettably, little advantage is taken of it. Our procedures and scrutiny would be more effective and better legislation would go on the statute book and would not need to be revised so often if we took advantage of it.

It would be churlish and ungrateful not to acknowledge three technical aspects—to reflect my hon. Friend's intervention—of great importance, where changes for which I have been pressing for some time have been incorporated in the Bill. I refer first to changes to schedule A. I am grateful that the Government propose that the profits of companies involved in real estate should be taxed according to the same criteria used for other forms of business. A case could never be made in equity or in economic theory why that should not be so. I am sorry that the Government have not gone to the logical extent of extending that principle to companies.

I am equally grateful for the proposed changes in roll-over relief but—and I will make this point in Committee if I have the chance to do so—there is no

reason for not taking matters to their logical conclusion, which would save 30 or 40 pages of appendices. It could simply be stated that roll-over relief applies whether the funds are rolled over into incorporated businesses, assets or shares in businesses run by individuals trading as a principal.

Finally, in respect of personal equity plans, in the past I have pressed for new clauses or amendments to Finance Bills to achieve a reduction in the distorting effects of tax breaks available for retail savings, by wrapping them all up in one vehicle. I would like bank deposits, which now enjoy tax-exempt special savings account facilities, and all forms of financial instrument, including equities, convertibles and bonds, to be available through the same vehicle and on the same terms.

The Bill makes a major step forward with the proposal that bonds can be included in a PEP, for which I am grateful, but I am sorry that the Government have not gone the whole hog and allowed individuals to manage their own PEPs—to set aside a portion of their portfolios and to manage them themselves. The present PEP tax breaks do little, especially for savers on small incomes. They pay tax at the marginal 25 per cent. rate and have no reason to benefit from capital gains tax concessions that PEPs offer because they do not normally enjoy capital gains of more than £5,000 a year. Such people generally find that the tax benefits of a PEP do no more than compensate for the management fees that they have to pay to intermediaries for enjoying such tax breaks.

I should have thought that the introduction of personal assessment would be a good opportunity to go a little further and allow people to manage their own ring-fenced savings and to put into them such maximum amounts as the Government may consider that they can afford in any one year. Any breaks for such savings contribute to the favourable shift in the burden of taxation from more damaging direct taxes to indirect taxes, which has been one of the many encouraging features of Conservative fiscal policy over the past 15 years.

5.9 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) chose to quote an apt and fairly obvious text in his speech—the words of the Maples memorandum. The former Financial Secretary said:

> "the reality is now that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer."

Even the old Labour party could not have put it better than that. Certainly, this Bill does not improve matters. It probably makes matters worse. I shall try to give one reason why the rich have been getting richer on the backs of everybody else. It is partly because for the first time, certainly since the 1920s and 1930s, financial policy has economic and industrial policy in its stranglehold. The bankers and the central bankers now rule to a greater extent than at any previous time, certainly since 1945 and before.

The Government have made two major economic blunders. The first was to enter a regional, fixed-exchange system—the exchange rate mechanism—when there was very little exchange control left in the world and we had a global economy. Then, of course, when that became a disaster, the Government made another major error—partly, no doubt, in panic—and I am sure that the Treasury has regretted it ever since. In effect, as the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) said, the Government handed over control of monetary policy to the Governor of the Bank of England.

Again for the first time since the war, we have a division of control: the Government control fiscal policy, at least in theory, while the Governor of the Bank of England controls monetary policy. The wretched meetings that take place every month—the Eddie and Kenny show—do not come up to Pete and Dud or Smith and Jones. Every month the two portly gentlemen sit there, take each other's temperature and no doubt also stuff a thermometer into the mouth of the British economy and perhaps other parts of its anatomy as well. After every month's meeting, the teenage scribblers in the City are in a state of neurosis trying to discover what has gone on.

I have been in the House long enough to remember fine tuning. Were I not addressing such an august gathering, I would say, "Hands up who remembers fine tuning." You probably remember fine tuning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I do not know whether anyone else does. Fine tuning was condemned throughout the 1970s in trenchant speeches by Baroness Thatcher and various other financial experts then on the Opposition Benches. Fine tuning was condemned as a terrible thing: how could industrialists plan for the future or for investment with all that Government interference in the marketplace?

The present monthly meetings really amount to fine tuning. Every month those involved sit down and look at the economy; then interest rates go up or down by a quarter or half a per cent. point, or by half a per cent. I feel sorry for any industrialist or business man who has to plan and invest and try to create growth in his or her business faced with the nonsense of those meetings every month.

I intended to direct a comment to the Chief Secretary, had he still been present, but I will address my remarks to the Financial Secretary. I hope that they will try to persuade the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give it a rest for a month. Why not make it every two months to let things settle down? It is ridiculous to have such an absurd division and method of conducting matters.

Once upon a time—more people may remember this than fine tuning, and we heard about it from the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding—there was the fashionable doctrine of monetarism: the teaching and lectures of Professor Friedman, if I may use that shorthand form. It certainly existed in the 1970s and 1980s, until Lord Lawson decided that he either did not understand monetary policy or that he was tired of it and so a different monetary policy was introduced. Lord Lawson's monetary policy was to shadow the deutschmark. Apparently nobody told the then Prime Minister, but Lord Lawson went on shadowing the deutschmark, into the exchange rate mechanism we went and the rest, as they say in Hollywood, is history.

What is happening at the moment and the way in which monetary policy is being controlled is not monetarism. I have some respect for intelligent monetarism, but the present policy is not even monetarism. M3 has practically gone out of the window. M4 has gone, MO has gone and also M1. I even remember domestic credit expansion—hands up who remembers that—and I remember sterling M3 as well. Clearly, few Conservative Members know very much about such things, so perhaps one should delve back in time a little, although I accept entirely that we should not become trapped in history.

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

Today's policies are not monetarism because monetarism had a certain rationality, although it did not work very well. Perhaps that is why Lord Lawson gave it up and why none of the central banks of the world, although they may pay lip service to it, pays much attention to M3 and M4. The Bundesbank still pretends, but it misses its targets most of the time and when it misses its targets it does not adjust its guidelines or ranges.

Now we have something quite different, although I am not really sure what it is. I suppose if one hands over the control of money to the high priests of the mysteries, one ends up with some kind of mystical monetary policy. I can describe it only as a kind of monetary policy based on the jus naturale or natural law—a kind of medieval policy. Apparently, the Governor of the Bank of England knows the natural growth rate of the British economy. I do not know what it is, and I do not suppose that the Governor knows either although he pretends that he does. It is a little like the old courts of equity, which used to say that justice varied according to the length of the Chancellor's foot. Perhaps the natural growth rate of the British economy varies in a similar way.

Apparently there is a natural growth rate and woe betide us if it increases by a little above that natural growth rate: if that happens, up go interest rates, the Governor gets into a terrible state and the Chancellor has to do as he is told. Again, I feel sorry for the industrialist who has increased productivity, whose growth is greater than the natural growth rate and who is trying to create jobs and investment. Along comes Eddie from the bank and tells him that he cannot do that, up go the interest rates and the industrialist has to pay more for his money.

How on earth are we expected to have investment-led growth in the British economy if the Governor of the Bank of England is for ever knocking any such growth on the head whenever he feels that the natural rate has been exceeded? Moreover, it is depressing that the natural rate seems to be based on extrapolation from the past. Sadly, governors of central banks, like generals, tend always to be fighting the last war, which can have very damaging consequences for an economy.

There has been no real attempt to consider the changes that have taken place in the British economy over the past 10 years: the changes in the labour market, the massive global changes that are taking place in the economies of many countries in the world, the fact that tariffs are coming down and will rapidly disappear with GATT, and all the pressures on costs—those matters are apparently not taken into account. Instead, we are told that the high priests—the bankers—know what the natural growth rate is.

Unemployment, too, is a favourite target for central bankers. Again, apparently, there is a natural level of unemployment. What a cheek they have. According to the Governor, in a lecture a week or so ago, there is something called structural unemployment. I do not know what that is, but clearly the Governor does. If, at one of those monthly meetings, it appears that one extra poor individual has found a job, taking the number of unemployed below the natural level, up go interest rates to hit him on the head and ensure that no one else gets work.

One may tease and satirise, but it is a brutal, cynical and cruel policy because it targets the unemployed on the basis of very little rational analysis of what is happening. Moreover, not only is that the Government's policy operated through the Governor of the Bank of England; I am sorry to say that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench also seem to support the handing over of monetary policy to a central bank. That happened in the 1930s when both main political parties paid obeisance to Montague Norman and it is happening again. All the fashionable opinion in this House and all parties apparently dare not question the nonsense currently known as monetary policy.

If I were unemployed, I would ask, "Who needs a Bank of England?" I spent four years as a Treasury Minister, with responsibility not for the Bank of England—thank goodness—but for matters covered by the Bank, and I often asked myself that question.

In those days, the Bank of England did certain things. It had to control the movement of capital and there was exchange control. That involved 400 people pushing pieces of paper around. I was responsible for banking legislation and, perhaps foolishly, I decided that the Bank of England should be the institution to deal with banking regulation. That responsibility could have gone elsewhere or to another institution.

After 1979 and the changes in the 1980s, the Bank of England still regulates the banks, but exchange control has gone. With floating exchange rates, who needs central bankers? Apparently, the Bank of England sold Government stock. I do not know whether the Bank is responsible for that. When I was in the City a very long time ago, there was a splendid man with a high hat and pin-stripe trousers employed by a firm called Mullens and Co. which had been selling Government stock for about 200 years. Apparently that company knew all about selling Government stock and did it very well. I am not sure whether the sale of such stock is still contracted out. If it is not, there should be market testing for the Bank of England.

What does the Bank do? I have been told that central bankers provide marvellous lunches. Apart from that, and clobbering the unemployed, what does Eddie do for his money? In all fairness, someone must ask on behalf of the unemployed, "Who needs Eddie George? Who needs the Bank of England?" My view may be old fashioned, but I believe that it is wrong for Governments to hand over control of important matters relating to the economy and of monetary policy when those matters affect the livelihoods—and sometimes the lives—of people. It is wrong for Governments to hand over control to undemocratic and unelected institutions, but that is what has happened and it is no business of an Opposition to support a Government who do that.

One of these days there will be a catalyst. One of these days the fashion will change again. Until it changes, I do not see much investment-led growth coming to the British economy or much reduction in unemployment. The rich will get richer, the rest will get poorer, and the poor and the poorer will have no hope because democracy will not provide them with any hope.

5.23 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). His speeches are always

entertaining, witty and erudite. I cannot agree with much of his speech, but I am glad that he took the opportunity to remind the House of his time as a Treasury Minister during those halcyon days of Lord Healey.

When Lord Healey presided over the economy, interest rate stability was the order of the day. British industry, and those who tried to run British industry, had the certainty of stable interest rates under Lord Healey's guidance. They had low inflation and an economy which usually had to face at least two or three Budgets a year.

Mr. McAvoy: Would the hon. Gentleman care to reflect on his own record in respect of presiding over financial matters?

Mr. Legg: My financial record is outstanding. My contributions, in national and local government, to saving money and to efficiency are outstanding.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Llanelli that our affairs are still overshadowed by the figure of Lord Lawson. The shadow of Lord Lawson is still cast on the making of our economic policy. Lord Lawson will certainly rank as one of the more interesting Chancellors of modern times. He was certainly a great reforming Chancellor with regard to taxation. However, his reputation was badly tarnished by the financial mismanagement of monetary policy in the late 1980s, to which the right hon. Member for Llanelli referred, when we followed a policy of shadowing the deutschmark. Hon. Members will also recall that he advocated our membership of the exchange rate mechanism.

Lord Lawson's mistakes in monetary policy still affect our economic policy making today. However, we can understand why the Government have paid so much attention to trying to get monetary policy right and to providing monetary stability.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Do the hon. Gentleman's comments about Lord Lawson apply, in terms of his criticism of policy at that time, to the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury?

Mr. Legg: Opposition Members, and particularly the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), will recall that, when Lord Lawson appeared before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, he was asked to comment on the making of monetary policy. He said that interest rates went up when he said so. That was how monetary policy was run under the stewardship of Lord Lawson.

My colleagues on the Treasury Bench can be rightly proud of the fact that the making of monetary policy is now more open and more balanced. I support the current openness, and I believe that the publication of the minutes of the meetings between the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England improves the economic debate in this country. They show the people who are running businesses and investing in this country how monetary policy is being made.

I do not agree with some hon. Members and commentators who believe that the Governor and the Bank of England have been given de facto independence. When the Governor gave evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, he took pride in the fact that he took the initiative in respect of the last interest rate increase. When the Chancellor gave evidence, he admitted that some power has passed from the Treasury to the Bank. He believed that that was good for the markets and that they now had more confidence in the making of monetary policy.

I do not believe that there is de facto independence. I believe that we have arrived at a halfway house. The way in which that halfway house operates must be considered further. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) referred to the open market committee of the Federal Reserve bank in the United States, which also produces minutes. However, if we consider central bank operations in the United States and in Germany, it is clear that there is a more collegiate approach to monetary policy.

One of our present problems is that, from the minutes of the monthly meetings between the Chancellor and the Governor, it is clear that a whole range of indicators have been brought into play. Decision making on interest rate policy seems to be all too anecdotal.

Again, in the rhetoric of the Chancellor and the Governor we find much about stopping the boom-and-bust cycle. That is an echo of the late 1980s and of the problems that we experienced under Lord Lawson. But if we look at the figures in Red Book and at what is happening in the real economy, we can see very little chance of boom and bust in the current monetary environment.

The monetary environment in the United Kingdom, like that in most G7 countries, is very subdued. Domestic demand in the United Kingdom is running at about 2.5 per cent., and overall growth is running at 4 per cent., but the major contributor to that overall growth level is a greatly improving exports position. About 1.5 per cent. of the total increase in GDP is due to excellent export performance. Domestic demand is probably growing at only about trend level—2.5 per cent., perhaps less—because part of that growth in domestic demand is due to current stock-building.

I see no justification for trying to put up interest rates on the basis of trying to discourage domestic consumption or, as we have heard in the past, to restrain house prices, for instance. House prices and asset prices are very subdued. Domestic consumption is also subdued.

I have some words of caution for the Chancellor in his meetings with the Governor. In the Red Book, we find that interest rate policy and monetary policy are supposed to be set according to expectations of inflation levels in two years. At the previous meeting of the Governor and the Chancellor, when the Governor requested an increase in interest rates, his forecast for inflation in two years—the forecast of the Bank of England—showed a falling expectation for inflation. In his discussions, the Chancellor certainly needs to be sceptical of further requests from the Governor for interest rate increases.

The other aspect of the Lawson years was very effective taxation reform. Lord Lawson had a successful formula for taxation reform, and that was to establish lower rates and broaden the base. The Finance Bill has several tax reform measures, but I draw hon. Members' attention to changes in relation to capital gains tax in particular.

On capital gains tax, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction from the Lawson principle of lowering rates and broadening the base. Capital gains tax remains high—40 per cent. Few of our competitor countries have fixed capital gains tax at 40 per cent. Treasury Ministers

[Mr. Legg]

also recognise that that is too high a level of taxation, because their strategy, rather than to lower the rate or fundamentally to reform capital gains, is to increase exemptions, backed up by tough anti-avoidance provisions.

We see in the Finance Bill several measures to extend exemptions. There are now incentives for investing in quoted companies through personal equity plans. There are now incentives for investing in unquoted companies through venture capital trusts and through enterprise investment schemes. There are now arrangements whereby people can roll over capital gains between trading assets and also roll over capital gains into shares. We have a range of exemptions to the capital gains tax legislation.

Hon. Members can justify all those changes and all those exemptions as having very worthy objectives, such as the objective of further investment, about which we have heard from my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary this afternoon, but however worthy those objectives might be, certain fundamentals do not change.

Risk does not change. At the moment, many people do not invest in venture capital because they assess it to be a high-risk sector of the market. Changing the tax regime will not alter the basic risks involved. Also, the more financial vehicles that one sets up to try to find exemptions and ways around the very high levels of capital gains tax in the United Kingdom, the more financial intermediaries are involved. Financial intermediaries want remuneration for their involvement. We need to see root-and-branch reform of capital gains tax.

We are overtaxing capital gains, only to relieve certain favoured activities. That fundamental approach of overtaxing an activity as a whole but picking favoured activities that one wants to relieve from tax is very interventionist. It is an approach that Opposition Members often advocate. It does not fit altogether easily with a Government who are committed to the free market.

I have a word of caution also on loopholes. We have heard much from the Opposition about loopholes and the enormous amount of tax they might raise. Conservative Members have certainly highlighted the fact that the Opposition are really talking not about loopholes but about extra taxes. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, in his 1993 Budget, to some extent sought to steal the Opposition's thunder by bringing in provisions—anti-avoidance legislation—which he claimed would increase the taxation take by about £2 billion. He thought that £2 billion extra over three years could be gained by bringing in legislation which, to some extent, blocked loopholes.

My right hon. and learned Friend considered many of those loopholes to apply to capital gains tax. It is interesting to look at this year's Red Book and the figures that the Inland Revenue has provided for its estimate of the take from capital gains tax in the current year. We find that it has revised the estimated revenue down from last year's figure of £1.3 billion to £0.8 billion. For the subsequent year—1995-96—the figure is only £800 million. I suspect that the Inland Revenue's claims for substantial increases in revenue from blocking loopholes and putting in place significant anti-avoidance measures are not borne out in practice.

I urge Treasury Ministers to keep an audit of those projections for extra revenue from anti-avoidance provisions, because I do not think that they achieve the figures that were originally set out. I am sure that Ministers widely accept that, in today's global economy, people and capital are very mobile. If we seek to inhibit the way in which people undertake transactions in their attempt to obtain a little extra revenue, they often take advantage of mobility, do their transactions differently, or are less active in their investment procedures.

Overall, a full reform of capital gains tax, based on a tapering system whereby those who invest in capital for the long term in this country are properly rewarded by having a reasonable overall level of taxation levelled on their gains, is the correct route to take.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary highlighted some of the fine aspects of the legislation. Some of the reforms that he particularly highlighted are those in respect of self-assessment, which he believed would help the British economy. From a cursory look at the Finance Bill, I endorse many of the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding and his concern about the standard of draftsmanship in the legislation and about the obscurity of some of the legislation. In looking at the Finance Bill, we must bear in mind the fact that the Government's policy is to deregulate.

One must be very careful, when putting another 350 pages of taxation legislation on the statute book, that one is standing true to the overall principle of deregulation. Many of the provisions will have to be interpreted by Inland Revenue staff throughout the country, and there is no guarantee that they will be able easily to understand the detail and interpret those provisions properly. The process of trying to understand them will be a burden on British industry and business.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli told us a great deal about economic history in the UK. Those of us who have been in the House for a comparatively short time were grateful for his tour de force. He took us back over at least 20 years. I remember a speech by Sir Keith Joseph in 1979—the Stockton lecture, entitled "Monetarism is not enough".

The centrepiece of the Red Book and the Government's financial strategy has some worthy elements—for example, low inflation, exchange rate stability, low national debt and, right at the heart, a declining public sector borrowing requirement. Those elements are at the core of the Government's strategy. The right hon. Member for Llanelli and other hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise them as the convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht treaty.

We cannot have a successful economy simply by looking at convergence criteria. They are not particular economic virtues in themselves; their whole purpose is to produce a certain level of fiscal stability, so that central bankers running a European central bank can set an interest rate policy across Europe in the knowledge of that stability in debt levels and fiscal policy. Basically, it is for their convenience that convergence criteria have been put at the forefront of economic policy both in the United Kingdom and in many of our EU partner countries. However, convergence criteria are not enough to ensure a healthy economy.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has introduced many supply side measures that will help the economy, but we must be very conscious of the overall level of public spending. I remind hon. Members of a statement by Lord Lawson in 1977:

"The real evil of excessive Government spending, and the excessive taxation that must necessarily accompany it, lies . . . in the certainty of misallocation of resources, economic and social debilitation, excessive state power, and—very far from least—the erosion of personal freedom."

Conservative Members are very concerned to guard against excessive state spending, which has often been made tolerable for many people in the productive economy by high levels of inflation. Governments have spent heavily on behalf of the state, but usually it has been at the same time running very large Government borrowing requirements, which have been financed by inflation. Those who bought Government debt in those circumstances have never received the returns that were originally implied.

The world financial and economic environment today is different. Inflation is very subdued, with especially low levels in the United Kingdom. Running large budget deficits under those conditions is not sensible economics. In the United Kingdom and in many other countries people are having to pay much higher levels of taxation to finance high levels of public spending. There are limits to how much people are prepared to pay.

The Red Book shows that the level of taxation is now moving up to 40 per cent. of gross domestic product. Clearly, there is resistance to further increases and to the tax base being spread even more widely. Western European countries have often taken that into account by switching their tax-raising powers from direct to indirect taxation, but even with indirect taxation, there are limits on how far a Government can go.

If Governments increase indirect taxation excessively, people may stop buying goods or they may resort to the black economy. If taxation weighs especially heavily on the poor, or if it is perceived to do so, the Chancellor—as we have seen in recent weeks—may fail to get support from Parliament. Therefore, the overall levels of taxation caused by excessive Government spending need to be kept under review.

Currently, middle England is suffering from an excessive level of taxation. The tax burden on many people has risen over the past few years, and there will be further rises in the next 12 months. To make that tolerable, the Government's commitment to containing public expenditure and driving down excessive levels must be renewed and strengthened. That priority must be at the centre of our economic policies, because it is a necessary ingredient to reinvigorate the confidence and enterprise of the British people.

That is a clear divide between Conservative Members and Labour Members. The whole philosophy, strategy and policies of Labour Members, whether or not they wish to declare them, are driven towards ever higher levels of public spending. With that, and with low inflation, it is inevitable that the Labour party stands, and always will stand, for high levels of personal taxation. That is the charge which it must answer in this House and which, in due course, it will have to answer at the hustings.

5.47 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) basically said that the Government need an economic policy that will work. He has told us what is wrong with their policy 15 years after it started. Those of us who have been in the House a few years have been on that roller-coaster a few times.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), in his characteristically euphoric way, selected the good news. There is some good news and those of us with a genuine interest in the British economy welcome that. However, the hon. Gentleman showed a confidence that history suggests should be tempered with caution. In particular, he implied that inflation was now conquered. There is no question but that inflation is low and is staying at a low level, and that is welcome. However, when we talk, as most of us do, to business people, we do not find an underlying feeling that it will necessarily stay low or, indeed, that interest rates will stay low. In fact, real interest rates are high and rising, which possibly explains why Britain's investment climate is not good. It is certainly nothing like as good as the Government forecast. I am sure that the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding will acknowledge that those of us who serve on the Select Committee were sceptical about that forecast.

Mr. Quentin Davies: There is no difference between me and the hon. Gentleman. We both agree that it is important that inflation is kept down. We both agree that inflation has been brought down to encouraging levels. We both agree that we must not be complacent about that.

It is precisely because we must not be complacent that I commended the Government on taking several courageous steps. I specifically mentioned three—the decision to increase interest rates much earlier in the cycle than has previously been the case; the decision to increase taxation and reduce the fiscal deficit; and the decision to underwrite the soundness of monetary policy by publishing the minutes of meetings between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England. The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to the points that I made.

Mr. Bruce: I shall not make the mistake of giving way again to a repeat of the speech that I heard the first time. The hon. Gentleman will hear my argument develop, and perhaps he will get my point.

We constantly hear Ministers and Conservative Members say that the Government's objective is to lower taxes and public expenditure. The reality is that, after 15 years, they have succeeded on neither count. They have not reduced public expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product. Nor have they reduced the tax take—in fact, they have increased it. From 1974 to 1979, the period of the previous Labour Government, when Denis Healey was Chancellor of the Exchequer, total taxes as a percentage of GDP amounted to 35.75 per cent. The Government predict that, by the end of this Parliament, the tax take will be 37.75 per cent. of the total. That is the prediction of a Government who not only say that they are committed to tax cuts, but pretend that they have delivered them. Not only have they not done so; they have presided over the biggest single increase in taxes in one year under any Government of any persuasion.

I hope that the Government's record and their credibility are wearing impossibly thin. They will find it extremely difficult to persuade the British people that,

[Mr. Bruce]

even if they have the genuine desire to deliver, they have the slightest idea of how to do so. They must be judged on delivery and not on their ambitions, which they have not fulfilled.

Most people will remember that a major feature of the previous general election was the claim that people would face an enormous tax bombshell if there was a change in government. As a result of the previous three Budgets, the average family will pay more than £1,000 a year more in tax than they did before the previous general election. That resulted from electing a Government who specifically warned the public against the dangers of electing anyone else, saying that they should fear tax rises.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington) *rose—*

Mr. Bruce: If I may, I shall proceed because an important argument needs to be developed.

The other problem that the Government ignore is the massive and apparently unshiftable increase in unemployment. Again, I am not speaking as an apologist for the Labour Government. In a sense, I am independent of their record, but the facts speak for themselves. Many of us remember the poster that read, "Labour isn't working". I seem to remember that unemployment at the time was 1 million. It is now running down from 3 million to 2.5 million. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) referred to the concern of the Governor of the Bank of England about structural unemployment. He says that he does not think that it can go much below 2.5 million. Other commentators say that that may be right, but perhaps it can go no lower than 2 million.

The cost of unemployment is, fundamentally, making it impossible for the Government to get out of their economic bind. It is worth summarising that the total cost of unemployment is £25 billion. The difference between the net extra cost of unemployment when the Government came into office and the cost now is £15 billion a year. The benefits of receipts of £118 billion from North sea oil and £77 billion from the privatisation windfall have been wiped out by the cost of unemployment. It is not good enough for Ministers to say that they do not believe that there is an unemployment strategy. Alternatively, they believe that simply to lower inflation, to cut public expenditure and to cut taxes will solve the unemployment problem. Evidence suggests that the contrary is the case.

The country is now entitled to say that, after 15 years of failed economic policies, however honestly pursued, the party in government has had 15 years too much credit. It really is time to start looking at alternative ways of prioritising our economic objectives and delivering them. Clearly, we must do something to achieve that.

On the specifics of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget strategy, it was ironic that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West lectured previous Governments for having sometimes three Budgets in a year when the Government have just produced two Budgets in a week. That suggests that some people are standing in a pit and do not realise which way the mud is flying.

A particular concern has been highlighted. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who opened the debate for the Opposition, drew specific attention to a paragraph in a Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report. I asked the Committee to include it and it agreed to do so. It is specifically relevant to the issue of duty on alcohol.

I urge the Government to get to grips with the matter. The Chancellor made it clear in Budget No. 1 that he recognised that no justification existed for increasing the duty on alcohol. Ironically, he decided to cut the duty on sparkling wine. He acknowledged that an increase in duty would have two problems. First, it would aggravate the problem of cross-border shopping because of the differentials. Secondly, it would hit hard a major domestic industry, especially the spirits trade, but also the brewing industry. A week later, what did he do? He imposed taxes that widened the differential and that hit that important industry.

I shall declare a clear constituency interest. I represent whisky distilleries. Boundary proposals affecting my constituency, assuming I am successful in winning under the new boundary arrangements, will mean that I quadruple the number of distilleries that I represent. It is an important Scottish industry and an extremely important British industry. It is ironic that no one ever speaks about this, but the gin industry is not unimportant either. We produce those two important export products. Those industries employ a great many people and earn a great deal of foreign exchange. We should treat them with sensitivity. They all require a strong and healthy home market to be successful in the export market.

I urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer—perhaps the Financial Secretary could respond to this—to say what he will do about that, or that he will do something about it before the next Budget, because the industry cannot be left in such uncertainty. I have spoken to a number of people in the industry and visited one or two of the distilleries in my constituency. There is real anxiety that they will lose out and a feeling that their competitors in other countries receive a somewhat more sympathetic hearing from their Governments, who understand the importance of the matter. I urge the Government to respond to that.

Mr. John Townend: It is not just about having sympathy for those industries. If we are in the European Community, it is only right and proper that our industries should be able to compete on a level playing field. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the real dangers is not just the personal buying, but the smuggling that is going on at an increasing rate, and in which criminal elements are starting to appear? We all know what happened in America during prohibition. Does he agree that a danger exists?

Mr. Bruce: I do and I have acknowledged that, although I am still puzzled by the Government's cut in Customs and Excise staff. It is essential that we attack and intercept smuggling, but the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that part of the incentive for the smuggling is the wide differential in prices. That is not an argument for eliminating that. We should try to persuade our European partners to recognise the public policy benefit of not having alcohol duties that are too low. They should be encouraged to increase them a bit. We cannot, however, worsen the position by widening the differential. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but we must approach the matter at both ends—at the market as well as at the crime and smuggling ends. The Government picked a strange time to impose that saving.

I have another concern. I had an exchange with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when he was giving evidence to the Select Committee, and he did not satisfy me that the Government are as rigorous as they make out in keeping public expenditure under control. In particular, the Liberal Democrats have identified a number of areas of Government extravagance and waste that should be dealt with. Government spending on advertisements and entertaining has increased by several times the rate of inflation, with no evidence as to how that could be justified. Massive amounts of money are spent on consultants. I am not against consultants in principle, but the Government's own evidence suggests that the net financial benefit is very small. That seems to be a clear waste of money.

I found it interesting that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury took the view that it was unreasonable when the economic outturn was rather better than forecast for Government Departments to be expected to trim their budgets during the year. He said that it would create far too many management problems. Yet it is exactly what is imposed on local authorities and other agencies all the time.

The Department of Transport has told the railway operating companies—I know about ScotRail in particular—that they must find savings in the current financial year of between 5 and 10 per cent. That, of course, is to pave the way for privatisation. Incidentally, the consequences of that for Scotland are extremely severe. There is only one profitable rail service in Scotland. As the management in Scotland has said, there is only one possible way for a company that only operates trains—it no longer owns the track—to achieve cuts. It is to stop running loss-making trains. As every service in Scotland is a loss maker bar one, the consequences for the Scottish transport system are potentially devastating. It is not good enough for the Minister to say that the Government cannot do it to their own Departments, but they are prepared to do it to outside bodies.

The Government suggested this year that they had achieved enormous savings, but those savings were achieved simply by errors in forecasting and because the economic outturn was better than anticipated. That is fine, but it is not a real saving in terms of rigorous attack on waste. In that sense, the Government have not been as credible as they would like us to think.

Therefore, it is extremely important that the Government do not make the same mistake that was made during the Lawson years of talking about economic miracles and the fundamental transformation of the British economy. There is no evidence that we have achieved a position in which the British economy is capable of earning the increased amount that it needs to ensure that we can sustain our public spending programme and maintain our competitiveness. There are signs that the foundations are being laid. I hope that they are, but one would have to talk in terms of two, three, four or five years and the accumulated benefits of those five years before one could say that we had achieved a fundamental shift.

It is a big mistake to latch on to the good figures when we are coming out of the recession and to claim something much more far-reaching that is not justified. The warning in that is that politically motivated tax cuts in advance of an election, which are not justified by the economic performance, will have a severe negative effect subsequently. The Government should understand that the public will not be taken in twice. The public know what happened last time. The tax cuts were clawed back with interest and an awful lot of pain. Interest rates had to go up and we were knocked into a deeper recession than otherwise would have been necessary.

The Government have to recognise that if they want to talk about responsible and sound public finances, they have to do so at election time as well and not only in the immediate post-election period when it is much easier to make bold decisions and stand by them in the hope that they will get away with it in the long run. That has been alluded to even by Conservative Members. I seem to recall that the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), in his own dry way, once or twice has pointed out to Ministers that this time they might not find it so easy to fool people because the people were not likely to be taken in so readily twice.

As the Bill moves into Committee, we believe that the Government have either missed or failed to recognise opportunities on certain issues. As Liberal Democrats, we believe that certain reforms or changes in tax structure should be considered. I have already mentioned the duty on spirits. We shall certainly resist the Government's increases in duty on spirits in particular.

We believe that our proposal for reforming vehicle excise duty would be environmentally beneficial and would be welcomed. We intend to promote that. Our proposal is essentially to tax people on the use of their cars rather than on the ownership. We would switch the burden away from vehicle excise duty and put it on to petrol duty. Our calculations suggest that the overwhelming majority of motorists, even in rural areas, would be better off and the environment would also be better off. The Government could readily adopt such a proposal.

Several parts of the Government's new proposals for enterprise promotion and so on have already been mentioned. It is interesting that every time the Government introduce a new tax break, they by definition introduce potential new tax loopholes. The Government should at least respond constructively to any suggestions that potential abuses could be avoided before they have developed. We intend to make such suggestions.

It has been suggested that another way to promote energy efficiency may be to alter the VAT structure for energy-efficient building materials. That could usefully be debated. One of the ironies of the new 8 per cent. VAT rate on fuel is that it could be used for other items. Energy-efficient materials are one such item that is well worth considering.

We feel that several other proposals can and should be considered. Some of them have already been suggested from the Labour Front Bench and some have not. The Finance Bill is an enormously long Bill, with remarkably little in it. I echo the view previously expressed. Why do we have to say so little at such enormous length and tire ourselves out for so many hours in the process? I hope that we shall have some sharp and genuine debates on some real issues of tax policy, in which the Government might be constructive in recognising that there are some genuine ideas that come from outside their circle. If those ideas are not ready now, they will certainly be ready to be properly assessed and considered in Committee. We look forward to playing a constructive role in that process.

[Mr. Bruce]

Having said that, we have no confidence whatever in the economic policy that lies behind the Bill. In the circumstances, it is high time that the Government recognised that they have run out of steam and that it is time for other people and other ideas.

6.6 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Before I say something about the economic background to the Finance Bill and the measures in it, I should like to comment on the interesting but slightly grudging speech of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). He talked in particular about the rate of unemployment in Britain, which is 8.8 per cent. It goes without saying that every person in the House wants to do all that he or she can to effect a reduction in that rate. It is significant that the unemployment rate in Britain has been reduced by about 450,000 in the past two years. Vacancies are now at their best levels for the past four years.

As Britain exports some 30 per cent. of our manufacturing output, we do not live in isolation. We depend greatly on the worldwide trading environment. To that extent, it is worth comparing employment rates in Britain with employment rates elsewhere in the industrialised world. On those grounds, we fare rather better than the hon. Member for Gordon would have us believe. Our unemployment rate is 8.8 per cent. In Belgium, it is 14 per cent.; in France, 12.6 per cent.; in Italy, 11.9 per cent.; and even in Germany it is about the same as here, at about 8.2 per cent.

The significant point to make is that those countries that have the lowest ratio of taxation to gross domestic product—the United States with 5.4 per cent. unemployment, Japan with 2.9 per cent. unemployment and Switzerland with 4.5 per cent. unemployment—have the most significantly reduced unemployment. That shows effectively that, so long as the tax burden is lifted from industry and it operates in as deregulated an environment as is humane and sensible, industry will produce the jobs that we and all our constituents want in Britain.

The background to the Finance Bill was summed up rather accurately in the report on the Budget by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, which was published a few days ago. The Committee said that the background was

"the most encouraging economic environment for some years"

and that the Chancellor, who had appeared before the Committee, was justified in saying that there were enormous grounds for encouragement.

I happen to believe that our economy is right for a period of sustainable growth. We have relatively high and increasing productivity, a good export performance, low inflation, good industrial relations and the sort of supply side measures that lead to significant and sustained performance. That is borne out by business surveys. The latest west midlands business survey, for autumn 1994, said of the business climate that

"65 per cent. of firms believe business conditions in the West Midlands will improve and only 11 per cent. expect them to worsen".

The Confederation of British Industry survey for the west midlands, published at the end of last year, showed that 80 per cent. of companies polled expected that their sales and output would increase during the next two years. About 60 per cent. expected net increases in their labour force over that period.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) described the effect of the Finance Bill on small businesses somewhat grudgingly, despite the fact that many of the measures will be of great benefit to small businesses, and I am not alone in thinking that. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), who is on the Opposition Front-Bench finance team, will be aware that the Durham university business school did a commentary on the 1994 Budget for small businesses, in which it said:

"Small businesses will benefit more than most other sectors of the population."

Although it said that the short-term benefits might be "marginal", it thought that the longer-term benefits would be significant. The commentary ended:

"on reflection, this was a good Budget and entirely appropriate for the current economic circumstances".

It also mentioned the enterprise investment scheme and venture capital trusts and stated that the latter "can only be beneficial" for small companies. The Finance Bill and the Budget are entirely appropriate to the time and to the needs of small businesses, which produce so many jobs.

We talk a great deal about the feel-good factor. Obviously, as politicians, we want that factor to emerge because it is often reflected in the opinion polls. In one sense, however, the fact that the feel-good factor is not as evident as we would like, although the retail environment has changed recently, is evidence of the success of policies that have changed aggregate demand from consumption to exports and investment, which are significantly improving in the present environment and will lead to sustainable growth. It is no coincidence that, although consumer spending is increasing by only 2.4 per cent. per year—the Christmas figures were slightly higher—in real terms, export performance improved on last year by about 14 per cent. That improvement will underpin future sustainable growth.

I am not saying that we can be complacent, for example, about the effect of a slowly improving housing market on various sectors of the economy. I come from Kidderminster, which depends on the housing market for the sale of its carpets. Although we can talk of moving resources away from the housing market by reducing tax relief on mortgages, it is crucial for consumer confidence and for the building industry, which could employ about 750,000 people with an upturn in the market, that that improvement is maintained.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) that the Finance Bill and the Budget were possibly predicated on too conservative—with a small as well as a large c—a view of the natural trend of growth in the economy. Between 2 and 2.5 per cent. is too low. In the late 1980s, we produced levels of 4 per cent. and, in one year, of almost 5 per cent. Provided the Government maintain a secure grip on public expenditure and are thereby able to reduce taxation. I do not see why we should not do so again. I want the Government to reduce taxes at the lower end and to move more people out of taxation, as well as adding to the 5 million people who pay tax only at the 20 per cent. rate. That would stimulate the economy and gain a natural growth rate significantly

higher than the rate which we are enjoying and one which would approach the growth level that we enjoyed in the late 1980s.

I want to comment on three aspects of the Finance Bill—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but a certain amount of comment and conversation seems to be coming from Opposition Members. I hope that none of the hon. Members whom I have noticed engaging in those activities is expecting to catch my eye later.

Mr. Coombs: I understand that there is a maiden speech next, Madam Deputy Speaker, and there might be a certain amount of anticipation about that.

It is nonsensical for capital gains tax to take up no less than 365 pages of taxation literature. As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) said, at 40 per cent., it is significantly higher than the general rate of income tax and it inhibits the movement of assets. Within the capital gains tax regime, there is no differentiation between long-term and short-term gains. Significantly, I think that it was the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), speaking for the Labour party during a previous Finance Bill Committee in 1992, who proposed that the tax should be tapered for longer-term gains. The present rate is counter-productive. Studies in the United States have shown that a rate of about 15 per cent. would maximise revenue.

Although there are various ways of reducing the capital gains tax burden, as my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West said, increasing exemptions without decreasing the rate is not the way to go about it. An axe has to be taken to that Gordian knot and the rate of capital gains tax should be significantly reduced.

During the past few days, other hon. Members and I have been lobbied by constituents who employ a significant number of people in amusement arcades—*[Interruption.]* That may be a matter of hilarity to Opposition Members, but between 90 and 120 people in my constituency rely on that business for their livelihood.

Various other forms of gambling have been protected from the effects of the national lottery. The number of jackpot machines allowed in casinos has increased and concessions have been made to bingo clubs, the pools and even to betting shops—it is proposed that the latter should be able to have cash-only win machines. Despite those concessions, the gaming machine licence duty will increase by about 19 per cent. as a result of the Finance Bill and, for the first time, an amusement machine licence duty of £250 will be imposed on video machines.

It is expected that that measure will take no less than £60 million out of the industry's profits because it cannot be offset by higher charges to consumers. Inevitably, as has been said by the leading firm of City accountants, Pannell Kerr Forster, which looked into the effect of the duty, it will lead to not only a reduction in employment and job losses of 4,600—that should be of interest to Opposition Members and everyone in the House—but a loss of £15.8 million a year in national insurance and pay-as-you-earn contributions, an increase in social security costs of £200,000 a week and, ironically, a reduction in corporation tax receipts to the Exchequer of 28 per cent., or £10 million a year, from amusement arcades and operators alone.

I shall finish on this point—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Hon. Members may be anticipating a maiden speech, but surely they are not anticipating it that much. I happen to think that the proposal to impose an amusement machine licence duty was brought about in an environment significantly changed by the advent of the national lottery. Although the Government may wish to pass enabling legislation in the Finance Bill allowing them to impose that licence duty, I urge them not to impose the duty until they have had an opportunity to consider proposals put forward by the British Amusement Catering Trades Association and the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions to mitigate the effects of that tax on an industry that has a significant effect on employment in my constituency.

6.21 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): It is with great pleasure that I make my maiden speech to the House as the new Member for Dudley, West.

I begin by paying a generous tribute to my predecessor, the late Dr. John Blackburn. A man of great charm and courage, he radiated warmth and was popular and widely respected both within the House and throughout the constituency, where he was an energetic and effective Member of Parliament in dealing with constituents' problems. It is with a deep sense of responsibility that I succeed him in the task of representing the seat where I was born and have lived for most of my life.

Dudley, West is situated on the western fringe of the west midlands. It contains a number of small towns and villages, including Sedgley, an old market town that was once part of the Norman barony of Dudley; Kingswinford where I grew up, which dates back to the Domesday book; and Wallheath and Wordsley. They all border on the green belt and rural fringe of south Staffordshire.

The seat has changed radically over the 20 years since a Labour Member of Parliament was last returned to the constituency. Its population has grown enormously, with new housing developments, particularly in Amblecote and Gornal. Now, three quarters of those who live in the constituency own their own homes. Industrially, too, the seat has changed dramatically. The past 20 years have seen the closure of the steel industry and allied trades in Brierley Hill, Brockmoor and Pensnett. Recently, we have seen the growth of Merry Hill, a major retail and leisure complex. It is one of the biggest shopping centres in western Europe, with more than 2.5 miles of marbled malls attracting 23.5 million visitors a year. That prime retail site is more profitable than Oxford street. The area still produces the finest cut-glass crystal in the world and has some of the best pubs and beers to be found anywhere. My constituency has a strong and proud manufacturing tradition, with more than 2,500 small businesses, many of which are in specialist engineering and serve the motor industry.

The people of Dudley, West are practical, hard-working, open and honest. They keep their promises and expect others to keep theirs. On 15 December they spoke for the nation. In massive numbers, they voted against a Government who they believe have lied to them and betrayed them and are completely out of touch, and for a Labour party which they know is more in tune with their needs and aspirations and is developing a growing bond of trust and confidence with the British people.

[Mr. Ian Pearson]

My principal reason for speaking, however, is not to report the strength of feeling in Dudley, West about VAT on fuel, broken promises and the growing appeal of new Labour—the poll result amply demonstrates that. It is that my background is in business finance and economic development. Until I joined the House, I was closely involved in helping small and medium-sized businesses to grow, and in helping local and regional economic developments to increase jobs, improve skills and raise prosperity.

A burning issue in Dudley, West is the devastating impact of Merry Hill's success on town and village centres within my constituency and the neighbouring constituencies represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, East (Dr. Gilbert) and the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley). The seriousness of the problem is widely recognised and has produced a major change in ministerial guidance on out-of-town retail development. Nothing has been done, however, to alleviate the problems. Merry Hill's success owes as much to tax incentives for the site's development as to anything else, although I freely acknowledge the vision and entrepreneurial endeavour of the private developers who got the project off the ground. I want the affected centres in Dudley borough to be given special status in an amendment to a clause in the Finance Bill so that they can benefit from a package of tax reliefs and allowances similar to those on offer to Merry Hill when the site was developed. That would be natural justice.

More broadly, there is significant scope for a more imaginative use of tax breaks in funding economic and infrastructure development. Tax breaks should be designed to attract institutional funding support and provide support for public-private partnership development through the issue of regeneration and renaissance bonds. The Budget has missed an opportunity to develop that possibility and the private finance initiative is singularly lacking in that respect.

As a champion of small and medium-sized businesses, I welcome the purpose behind the establishment of venture capital trusts. My experience in the venture capital industry leads me to suspect that the Government's figures on the amount of funds that will be generated from it are highly ambitious, to say the least. I share the concerns and scepticism of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) that the scheme may degenerate into a tax avoidance mechanism for the very rich and produce no real benefit for businesses. That must not be allowed to happen. Neither VCTs nor business angels schemes—I presume that they are given greater support—will solve the problem of the equity gap that still exists. Nor is there an effective support programme for the vast majority of small and medium-sized businesses that do not want to go down the equity route but want to develop, grow and thrive.

The Government have a major role to play in assisting companies to upgrade the sources of their competitive advantage. That is not to deny the role of the market, but our country should provide at least the same level of support for our businesses as that offered by other regional and national Governments.

In the west midlands, our future prosperity is linked to the fortunes of the motor industry. We compete head to head with Baden-Württemberg in Germany and Emilia-Romagna in Italy. We have had significant successes, but the simple fact is that the support available in other regions of Europe for businesses is far ahead of what we can offer in the west midlands. We can, and must, do better to provide such support if we are to compete successfully in future European and world markets. Providing tax relief to defray research and development costs of small companies is one mechanism of merit that should be discussed further in the House, but much more is needed.

For a long time, I have been impressed by the way in which the German Government have supported growing businesses through the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau. There is a strong case for establishing and supporting regionally based business development banks and institutions in our country which could offer patient, long-term loan finance to companies. That matter should be considered in the Committee considering the Bill.

I have been able to touch on only one or two issues relating to small businesses that are the lifeblood of Dudley, West's economy, just as they are vital to the future of Britain as an industrial and trading nation. I believe that it is not the purpose of a maiden speech to go into significant detail, but I would welcome an opportunity to expand on those issues and themes in more detail at a later date.

I know that it is customary for a maiden speech to be heard in silence. I have been warned, however, that I cannot expect similar treatment ever again. I thank hon. Members for their courtesy this evening.

6.31 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): It is always a great pleasure and a privilege to follow a maiden speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) on his excellent maiden speech. I am sure that we will hear a lot more from him in future years.

The hon. Gentleman has clearly had a significant effect on the Opposition Benches, because as one who has attended practically every debate on a Finance Bill in the past 15 years, I can tell him that at 6.31 pm there would normally be just five Opposition Members present. *[Interruption.]* I have to admit that, normally, there would not be all that many of my hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches, either. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will those who are going out of the Chamber go quietly? Those who remain should also be quiet.

Mr. Townend: My right hon and hon. Friends and I are very grateful to the hon. Member for Dudley, West for his kind remarks about his predecessor, Dr. John Blackburn. He was extremely popular on both sides of the House. Even though he was older than me, he would often address me as father or uncle.

I believe that Madam Speaker must have done a lot of research when she put my name following that of our new colleague, the hon. Member for Dudley, West, on the list of speakers, because we have an awful lot in common. He has already told the House that he represents a seat in the area in which he was brought up and that he is a local Member of Parliament. I, too, represent an area of east Yorkshire in which I have lived all my life. There are not too many other hon. Members who can claim to be true

local Members of Parliament. It is a great advantage to represent the area in which one has lived all one's life, as the hon. Gentleman will discover over the years.

The hon. Member for Dudley, West also spoke about his interest in public houses and beers, and the House is well aware of my long-standing interest in the alcohol industry. I am sure that the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) would join me in welcoming the hon. Gentleman to the lobby which is trying to persuade the Government to give the brewing industry a level playing field in Europe.

In common with the hon. Member for Dudley, West, my occupation was in business finance. I started off as a chartered accountant and you said that one of your main interests—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Not the Deputy Speaker, but the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson).

Mr. Townend: The hon. Member for Dudley, West said that his main interest was small businesses and he raised some relevant provisions in the Finance Bill which concern such businesses. I am also involved in small businesses.

The hon. Gentleman has had a famous victory and we should not take that away from him. He follows a long line of hon. Members who also enjoyed famous by-election victories but who were not with us for too long. When we regain that seat, however, I hope that, in due course, the hon. Member will find a real safe Labour seat. I wish him well in his parliamentary career. I am sure that he has a valuable contribution to make. His experience in the business world in particular will be extremely valuable to his party, which is not well endowed with people experienced in business and, in particular, small businesses.

I had the privilege to be called to speak during the debate on the Budget, when I spoke at some length about the excellent performance of our economy in the past year and the Government's enormous successes. They have been mentioned in some detail by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg). With inflation at a low level, unemployment falling month by month, a recovery that has surprised everyone by being export led, the balance of payments deficit falling month by month, the Budget deficit falling faster than expected and investment and productivity rates rising, the performance of the British economy in the past year has been the best that I can remember. On the economic front, the Achilles' heel of the Government is spending and taxation—my right hon. and hon. Friends will not be surprised to hear that.

The size of the Finance Bill—it comprises 348 pages and contains 144 clauses and 29 schedules—suggests that my dear friends and colleagues at the Treasury have not yet got a grip on the Inland Revenue. We are supposed to be the party of deregulation; as such, there is absolutely no need to have a massive Finance Bill year after year, Bills that make our tax legislation more and more complicated. Whenever the Government come up with a good idea to encourage investment or to encourage business, the Revenue is so obsessed with tax avoidance that it hedges the idea around with so many qualifications, which run into hundreds of clauses and subsections, that no one can understand it. The purpose of a good proposition is, if not lost altogether, certainly weakened. The Opposition talk about tax avoidance and how they would increase the tax yield, but how they can criticise the Government, when, year after year, they produce a Finance Bill of this size, I do not know.

In the debate on the Budget I spoke at some length on the economy in general and tonight I would like to deal with one or two of the Bill's provisions that affect my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) has already raised one of them—tax on amusement arcade machines. As right hon. and hon. Friends will know, I represent three tourist and holiday towns—Bridlington, Hornsea and Withernsea—in which there are a considerable number of amusement arcades and operators. I have to say again that I think that those proposals have come from the Inland Revenue, and have not been especially well thought out.

I am especially interested in the comment of the Paymaster General, in a letter which he wrote to me, that

> "Government policy, as stated by the Chancellor, is to widen the tax base where sensible rather than increase the rate of individual taxes, or raise the rate of income tax."

I do not object to that in principle, but that is not the only choice. There is another, and that is not to widen the tax base, not to increase taxes at all, but to control and reduce public spending. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider that matter again. Even if they insist on obtaining that yield, it can be done more cost-effectively.

I have had a long telephone conversation with, and a letter from, a distraught constituent who is a small business man. He tells me that, if the proposals are passed unamended, he will be out of business. He takes only about £8,000 a year out of his small, one-man business. He operates single-site machines, which he lets, and he shares the stakes with the site owner. The new tax will cost him £8,000 a year. The tax on a two-operator machine will cost £500 a year, or £10 a week, while that on a one-operator machine will cost £250 a year.

If the measure is passed unamended, many of those machines will be withdrawn, so the Government will receive no income. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest said, the resulting loss in corporation tax, the increase in the costs of unemployment pay and social security to the people who lose their jobs and the loss in national health insurance contributions and pay-as-you-earn taxation makes one seriously wonder whether it is worth the candle.

The British Amusement Catering Trades Association has made some interesting proposals which would ensure that most of the yield that it is hoped the changes will produce will be achieved by another means. It proposes to decrease the rate on those machines to £100 and to introduce a new band of tax on the all-cash pay-out machines. I strongly urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider those proposals carefully.

I also urge my right hon. and hon. Friends, when they are preparing next year's Budget, to tell Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue that there will be no further new taxes.

Another matter, which affects my rural constituency, is the proposal to end the present concession, which has been in force for many years, that vehicle excise duties should be exempted for owners of vehicles that are used for short journeys of up to six miles a week on public highways between different parts of land that those same people occupy. Many agricultural holdings have parcels

[Mr. Townend]

of land that are geographically close to one another but not integrated within a ring fence, and many more have contiguous parcels of land that are bisected by public roads. People need to cross the road simply to move a tractor from one side to the other.

Under paragraph 2(h) of schedule 4 to the Bill, that exemption will be abolished. I do not know how much money will be gained as a result, but it seems to me that it is not a very sensible proposition, because such a road will be used only for very small distances, for convenience. That places another burden on agriculture. The measure will be especially burdensome to small farmers—and the Conservative party is the party that believes in and supports small businesses. I think that someone in the Department must have been trawling around, asking, "Where can we find an extra burden to put on various people?"

I trust that the present Finance Bill will be the last one in the present Parliament under which the overall burden of taxation will increase. From now on, taxation must be reduced, but that must be coupled with fiscal rectitude. The Government must adhere to the programme, which they have set out clearly in the Red Book, to reduce the public sector deficit. There must be no weakening on that.

I have stood in the Chamber year after year and said the same thing, and I say it now to my right hon. and hon. Friends: public spending at 42 per cent. of gross domestic product is far too much, and we should be ashamed of that level. However, the deficit may be reducing more quickly because revenues are increasing faster than forecast in the Red Book. If we succeed in reducing taxes—I think that we shall—we shall not put the future of the economy at risk if we reduce spending by an equivalent amount; there will be no effect on the fiscal stance.

If my right hon. and hon. Friends go out into the country to listen to what people are saying, they will discover that the great dissatisfaction with the Conservative party at the moment, as expressed in the by-election that brought the hon. Member for Dudley, West to the House, has nothing to do with disputes about Europe; the dissatisfaction is about crime, law and order and the way that people feel about the money in their pockets. Therefore, we should take no notice of the hon. Member for Gordon, who said that, at the next Budget, the Government should be very careful about cutting taxation. Of course he would say that, because he wants the Government to lose the next election.

We now have the platform and, if the Government do what they should do in the next year—if they do what their supporters want them to do—they will squeeze public spending sufficiently to give themselves ample resources to reduce taxes. That must be our first priority.

If anyone believes what the public opinion polls are trying to say—that the majority of people now believe that a Labour Government would deliver lower taxes than a Conservative Government—he or she is in cloud cuckoo land. Does anyone seriously believe that Labour Members, if they were ever to sit on the Government Benches, would make proposals to reduce spending? Does anyone believe that they would make proposals to reduce taxation? Every Labour Government have taxed more at the end of the Parliament than they did at the beginning.

It is the Conservatives' failure to live up to our reputation as the party of low taxation—our failure, as far as publicity goes—that has allowed people to start to believe that, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), "that lot over there" would spend less and tax less. They are in cloud cuckoo land.

I also wish to comment on the Opposition Members who continually claim that so much money can be saved for the Exchequer by closing loopholes. They do not mean closing loopholes; they mean closing concessions, so let everyone beware. *[Interruption.]* Yes; they mean closing concessions, such as the concession on inheritance tax that the Government introduced which allows family farms to go from father to son, and the concession that the Government introduced which allows family businesses to be carried on to the next generation, provided members of the next generation carry on the business and work in it.

Let the public beware: when the Opposition speak about ending concessions, they will hit the farmers—the small farmers, the family farmers. Let the farmers' sons know that the family farm might not go to them if the Labour party comes to power. Labour will hit the small businesses that the hon. Member for Dudley, West said that he had come to the House to represent. Those are the concessions that the Opposition want to do away with. We curtail avoidance methods every year when we bring forward the great bible—the Finance Bill. If Opposition Members can give good examples of tax avoidance that should be stopped, I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will be only too pleased to know about them.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Now try to be coherent.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) was in his place when I made some observations about sedentary interruptions, so I shall repeat my comment: I deplore them.

Mr. Townend: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, whom I have always considered to be a friend, would like to withdraw his remark, Madam Deputy Speaker. I served for many years on the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee and I always found the hon. Gentleman to be reasonable—the adjective which he used could be used of him, particularly when he was questioning a former Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I support one of my hon. Friends who said that next year, when we consider how to disburse the great treasure that we have saved by cutting public expenditure and give people back their money, we should look carefully at capital gains tax. With a minimum of expenditure we could simplify what has become a not very productive and complicated tax. It is so complicated and yields so little that I respectfully suggest that it might be a good idea to think of abolishing a tax every Budget, as we used to do some years ago.

As I said when we debated the Budget, I support the broad thrust of this year's Budget and the Finance Bill. I have every confidence that, as the year continues, the faces of the Opposition will become bleaker and bleaker as the recovery continues, the population feels better and better, unemployment continues to decrease, the budget deficit continues to fall and the balance of payments

moves into surplus. We shall deal with our Achilles' heel and at the next Budget we shall start a continuous programme of reducing taxation.

6.51 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson), who made an extremely confident and fluent maiden speech. I congratulate him on paying such a warm tribute to his predecessor and on his knowledge of his constituency, particularly the pubs and beer. It is clear that he will bring expertise to our debates. His speech showed a great knowledge of small businesses and what can be done to help them. I look forward to hearing what he has to say in future debates. I have no doubt that he would be an extremely good candidate for the Finance Bill Committee—a fate worse than death which perhaps I should not wish on him.

I shall devote most of my remarks to the Select Committee report on the Budget, which it is customary for us to consider on Second Reading of the Finance Bill. However, I shall first comment on the remarks of the Chancellor who, in a typically low key and modest way, said:

"I come before a Select Committee which will find it extremely difficult to ask any kind of critical questions on the macro-economy."

We also had some remarks in that vein from the hon. Members for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). It is true that there are some good signs about the economy. There is an economic recovery after the longest recession since the war. Inflation is still low and the balance of payments is improving, especially on exports. There are, however, a number of qualifications to be made.

Some of the recovery does not have much to do with the Government. There was a devaluation, which is not often mentioned. As a supporter of the exchange rate mechanism, I have to acknowledge that. Fortunately, I have a good alibi as it was I who coined the phrase that we entered the exchange rate mechanism

"at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons, at the wrong rate."—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1990; Vol. 177, c. 937.]

I said that on the day that it was announced to the House of Commons that we had entered the ERM. Fortunately, my remarks were reported in the House, so I have an alibi. Some Conservative Members do not. We owe much of our success in exports to the fact that we devalued. As the report shows, that has been the main motor of our recovery, but it is not often mentioned by Ministers and certainly not by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We do not often hear about the fact that, as a consequence of the two recessions, we still have a small manufacturing base and do not have enough capacity in the economy. The nature of the recovery means that there is not a feel-good factor. There have been cuts in living standards and many people, particularly in the south, are suffering from negative equity as a consequence of the crash in the housing market.

Having been in the House for some time and having heard successive Chancellors make grand statements about the economy, I warn that the use of hyperbole on the British economy has an extremely bad track record. We all remember the economic miracles associated with the 1980s—the boasts of Mrs. Thatcher, Lord Lawson and even the present Prime Minister. I remember the Prime Minister's speech just before we entered the longest recession since the war. A certain amount of humility from Ministers on the subject of the British economy would be in order. We all know that improving the British economy is a long, hard road and there are no short cuts. My hon. Friends are right to say that long-term investment in education and training and in research and development is important, but it takes time and there are no easy answers.

I wish to concentrate the rest of my speech on the subject of tax cuts. It is clear from the speeches of the hon. Members for Bridlington and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) that Conservative Back Benchers and those who voted for the Conservative party at the last election very much want to hear about tax cuts. In our report, we warned the Chancellor about the dangers of making tax cuts. Everyone in the House understands the attraction of cutting taxes. Even at the best of times our constituents are not wildly enthusiastic about paying taxes.

It is part of Conservative mythology that the 1992 election was won on the promise to cut taxes. Following the tax-increasing Budgets of 1993, the Opposition are entirely justified in throwing that promise back in the Conservatives' faces. The Dudley, West by-election was basically won on the back of those broken promises and the fact that the Conservative party promised to reduce taxes and then did not do so. Instead, the Government increased taxes by the largest amount in one single year—as everyone now knows.

We have just heard from the hon. Member for Bridlington that the Chancellor is under great pressure from many of his supporters to cut taxes as soon as possible, preferably in the 1995 Budget. It is clear why they want him to do that: they hope that it will restore their political fortunes. The question that my Labour colleagues and I put to witnesses at the Select Committee hearings—to the Government's economic adviser, the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor—was if and when it would be economically and not just politically justified to cut taxes. Their answers are of some interest to the House.

The Government's economic adviser, Mr. Alan Budd, saw two reasons why it might be unwise to cut taxes: if such action threatened sound public finances—to be fair, the hon. Member for Bridlington also mentioned that point—and if the economy was at or above its full capacity. When asked the same question, the Governor of the Bank of England agreed that tax cuts could be inflationary if the economy was overheated or was growing above capacity. In answer to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. O'Brien), he also said that if tax cuts were made at a time when the economy was overheating he would have to consider his advice to the Chancellor on the subject of increasing interest rates.

Not surprisingly, the Chancellor was less forthcoming in answer to our questions about tax cuts. He agreed—as he had to, because his economic adviser had just said it—that as well as the state of public finances he would have to consider the overall state of the economy before cutting taxes. He assured the Committee and the general public that he would not take risks with inflation, but he said little more; he has certainly not discouraged his

[Mr. Giles Radice]

supporters, such as the chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench committee, from assuring Conservatives that, come the next Budget, the Government will cut taxes.

Mr. John Townend: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. While cutting taxes in isolation could be dangerous for the economy, will the hon. Gentleman accept that if the tax cuts were balanced by spending cuts—if it were fiscally neutral—there would not be the same danger?

Mr. Radice: It would depend on the economic situation at the time. One would also have to consider the underlying economic situation, as Alan Budd told the Committee.

In considering the economic wisdom of tax cuts, the key issue is the extent of spare capacity in the economy—an issue on which we did not receive any clear answers. Last year the economy grew well above the so-called trend growth rate. Economic growth was 4 per cent., but the Treasury estimates the trend growth rate in the economy at between 2 and 2.5 per cent., which is about the growth rate that the economy has achieved in the past 10, 15 or 20 years. How long the economy will continue to grow above trend without overheating depends on how much spare capacity exists and whether there have been the supply side improvements about which Ministers and Government Members always boast but of which there is little hard evidence. The jury is still out on that question.

With regard to capacity, the chief economic adviser told us that the output gap is anything between 1 per cent. and 4 per cent.—in other words, he does not really know. However, most advisers were sceptical about the size of the output gap despite the long recession. For example, Mr. Gavyn Davies told us that he is now seeing a sharp tightening in the labour market. Mr. Christopher Johnson talked about the risk of inflationary pressures, while Mr. Andrew Brittan, who has a Keynesian reputation, said that much of the capacity which one might imagine would be present in the economy was lost during the recession. Therefore, he said, the economy could grow above trend for only a couple more years at the most.

The Select Committee concluded in its report that in view of the dangers of overheating, and given that we did not know how much spare capacity was left in the economy, it was correct to be cautious about the amount of spare capacity remaining and about the circumstances in which tax cuts would be justified economically. In his written evidence to the Committee, Christopher Johnson pointed out that the idea that taxes are being increased in this fiscal year only to be lowered in the following year

"seems like a pointless 'Duke of York' exercise, marching the troops up the hill only to march them down again".

One does not have to look at the crystal ball when one can read the book. There is a recent example of a Tory Chancellor cutting taxes when the economy was overheating and I am sure that the hon. Member for Bridlington remembers it very well. In March 1988 Nigel Lawson gave away £6 billion in a full year when inflationary pressures were already very strong. Partly as a consequence of that Budget, the economy went out of balance, interest rates had to be raised to record levels in order to balance it again, and the country suffered a prolonged recession from which we are only now recovering.

In his Budget speech, the present Chancellor told the House:

"Those who bask in their short-term popularity and neglect the need for sound economic measures will live to rue the day hereafter."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 1080.]

He should heed his own advice with respect to tax cuts.

7.5 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I am grateful to be able to take part in the debate as I have been privileged to speak in the two previous debates on the Budget, when I concentrated on an issue which is of particular interest to my constituency—the illegal importation of tobacco and alcohol products.

The House will be pleased to hear that I do not intend to spend too much time repeating those arguments today, although my commitment to solving the problem by approximating—I use the word "approximating" and not "harmonising"—duties throughout the European Union remains as strong as ever. I will continue to encourage Treasury Ministers and others to make sure that Ministers in other countries are aware of the health implications of the illegal importation of cheap tobacco and alcohol, its effect on the rule of law and on Government revenues, and the costs of trying to prevent the smuggling of those products.

Apart from that constituency point, I wish to address some broader issues, many of which have been mentioned already. I do not wish to repeat what has been said already, but I should like to pick up some of the points made by the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). I am always fascinated by the debate on spare capacity as I am never sure exactly what "spare capacity" means, although one has an instant vision of empty and rusting factories and of many people in long-term unemployment.

I believe that the fundamental problem of spare capacity is access to capital. If the pound is strong—as it is now—if there is a great deal of inward investment in the economy and, because of the expertise of the City and its international role, there is access to international capital at very competitive interest rates, it seems to me that capacity is limited only by our access to capital and our ability and desire to borrow it.

We can always build factories. Modern technological developments mean that factories are no longer the huge, acre-gobbling monsters that they once were. We can compare today's factories with the original Longbridge site, the memorable Rootes in Linwood and the old ICI at Teesside. Today smaller, much more efficient plants produce many more goods. We have to erase old-fashioned attitudes about production and manufacturing.

We must ensure, as the Government have, that we are able to access capital at a price that we can afford to pay. The key to achieving that aim is keeping down the inflation rate. One of the benefits of controlling inflation is the elimination of the short-termism that has plagued our country for the past 40 to 50 years, when investors could not rely on the fact that the pound would be worth exactly the same amount in two years' time as it was on the day they made their investment. If people cannot believe that their investments will retain their worth, they want high returns as compensation for that risk. If the pound is steady, our investments will become much more

attractive and we can build in long-term investment opportunities. That makes it a much more sensible proposition to invest long term, not just for the teenage scribblers in the City, but for those who are producing the wealth of the country. That will help our productive capacity enormously. The key to the Budget lies in our determination to keep inflation down and the pound stable.

Other advantages flow from having a stable pound. We shall be able to develop the international competitiveness of our goods and services. When we talk about inflationary pressures, we have to ask where they came from. One source is increased input costs, but one of the most significant factors in output costs is the cost of labour. We shall be forced to keep our labour costs low because we are competing in an international market, trying to match the output of factories in the tiger economies of Asia and the highly skilled, highly educated and appallingly underpaid work force in eastern Europe. Those are our competitors. It has nothing to do with Germany, France or Italy. The wage rates in countries such as those in eastern Europe and Asia will be the principal motors of our costs in terms of competitive production. That is why we shall continue to invest in industry, looking towards the high-tech industries and the development of the brain and intelligence skills required to compete. Keeping inflation low and a strong pound are the keys to achieving that.

I particularly support the development of venture capital that will provide investment in the smaller companies, which will be the real powerhouse of our recovery. I very much welcome the Budget proposals to help people wishing to invest venture capital. Those in high-tech businesses have long complained that they cannot get access to capital between £50,000 and £500,000. I hope that the venture capital trusts, which will allow people to invest and will reward them for investing, will be lean and mean enough to dodge the criticism from the larger venture capitalists, the banks and everyone else whose job it is to invest, that it costs just as much to invest £50,000 in a venture as it does to invest £1 million. We have to ensure that the venture capital trusts are sufficiently lean and mean to afford small investments as well as large ones. By encouraging venture capital trusts to be set up and encouraging the small investor who wants part of the action in venture capital, we shall have the potential to help those small businesses which so desperately need small loans.

Venture capital will also encourage small businesses to start looking at equity facilities instead of overdraft and loan facilities. It is not just the City which needs to be sophisticated—so do people running businesses who hope in the long run to make not just their own fortunes, but several other people's fortunes as well.

I come now to a national issue which is also particularly apposite in Hastings, where we have always had endemic long-term unemployment. I welcome the measures in the Budget to encourage employers to take on more of the long-term unemployed, but I should like to explore a slight tweak to the suggestion that employers get a national insurance holiday for employing the long-term unemployed. In principle, that is a very good idea, but the Confederation of British Industry conducted a survey of long-term unemployed people and one of its most significant findings was that 40 per cent. of those people are illiterate. With the best will in the world, no employer will take on an illiterate person for the value of his national insurance. Perhaps the Treasury might like to consider a pilot scheme to see how successful the national insurance holiday could be for the long-term unemployed and for employers. It may be possible to get that up and running before the measure is introduced more generally. If 40 per cent. of the long-term unemployed are illiterate, more help is required for them than a national insurance holiday for employers.

I come to another constituency issue that has been raised by a number of hon. Members. Hastings is a coastal town with significant tourist business. Like other hon. Members, I have been approached and lobbied by those running coastal amusements and leisure parks. One company has calculated that, net of VAT, the average weekly take in video games is £10. In the cranes, redemption and novelty category it is £62.93, and for kiddies' rides it is about £4.23. Those figures give us an idea of the problem faced by people who are trying to turn piers into places for family entertainment and who do not wish to replace everything by machines with money-only prizes. They do not wish to replace all the games of skill or competition with prize-only machines. It is in their interests if perhaps the Treasury could rethink and even take on board the BACTA recommendations.

Finally, because my area has a very mixed constituency, I will pick up on vehicle excise duty on farm vehicles, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). It will hit some of the farming community quite hard. Many of my farmers have land in different parts of a village. They need to travel on the roads and they are hard hit by the new measure.

We have a sheep farming community in Hastings. The sheep farmers are in a state of flux and ferment for all sorts of extraneous reasons and it would help if we were more sympathetic to them than imposing excise duty on their vehicles. One suggestion from a local farmer is that perhaps farmers could apply for a licence at a higher rate than currently applies, but which could be used in the same way as licences are used by garages so that they could transfer one licence from machine to machine. They would be prepared to do that. They insist on having their machines roadworthy and they are happy and proud for them to go on the roads, but if each machine has to be licensed separately it will put exceedingly great pressure on people who already feel pressured, particularly in my part of the world.

I commend the bulk of the Finance Bill—it certainly is bulky—and hope very much that the Treasury will take on some of the points that I and many of my hon. Friends are making.

7.19 pm

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): Notwithstanding the last rather more critical remarks by the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), she painted a fairly rosy picture of prospects for the British economy during the next few years. It is probably a picture that many of our constituents would not recognise. Some 11 million of them—that is 40 per cent. of the work force—have experienced unemployment during the past five years.

Not surprisingly, many commentators, including Opposition Members, view the Finance Bill as a measure that promises much but delivers very little indeed, notwithstanding its considerable bulk. It will do nothing

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

to tackle the underlying sense of insecurity that is prevalent in many of our communities, and will do little to build the partnership economy that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House espouse—high investment, growth and, most importantly, employment. Some of the Budget's central measures will undermine the attainment of those objectives. It entrenches a Britain of double standards and unfairness.

The Budget does nothing to put into reverse the failures of Conservative practices over the past 16 years. I noticed from earlier contributions that some Conservative Members are apparently getting cold feet about the approach taken in the past few years. Last year, I read the interesting economic lecture given by the current Secretary of State for National Heritage, in which he criticised the free market approach adopted in the late 1980s, which he said had been built on sand and led directly to the recessionary consequences that many of our constituents are suffering.

Earlier, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) spoke of the failures of the period when Lord Lawson was in charge of economic policy. The hon. Gentleman might have added that the current Prime Minister was at that time Chief Secretary to the Treasury and is equally responsible for the mess in which the British economy now finds itself.

During the past decade, the Government have been responsible for low investment, inadequate training, unacceptably high unemployment and, to cap it all, unfair taxation—that from a party that promised year after year, election after election, low taxation. The Conservatives have provided no long-term growth, mismanaged public finances and broken their promises. The dogma that the free market is king has produced a United Kingdom ravaged by decline, division and increasing doubts among the electorate.

When Conservative Members talk about their party being the party of financial rectitude and able economic management, they ignore the evidence of their own eyes. The past few years have been disastrous for the British economy and for the British people.

Although recent falls in official unemployment, low inflation and some evidence of short-term growth are welcome, there is no proof that Britain has secured a permanently high level of sustainable economic expansion. Continuing low manufacturing investment and its decline in the past few quarters, falling employment paralleled by falling unemployment, the emergence even now of the beginning of skill shortages, and evidence of inflationary pressures, give little ground for hope that the recovery will be sustainable at the rate that Britain needs to make good the ravages of the past recession—let alone to put it on the road to full employment.

The Finance Bill should have been geared to creating new job opportunities. Instead, it demonstrates total complacency towards the unemployment confronting 2.5 million of our constituents—1 million of them are suffering long-term unemployment. The number of very long-term unemployed, who have been out of work for two years or longer, is increasing and higher than two years ago.

One of the Chancellor's central measures—the national insurance holiday to encourage employers to recruit the long-term unemployed—does not even warrant a mention in the Bill, and neither will it be introduced this year. The long-term unemployed must wait until April 1996 before that measure takes effect. I hope that the Financial Secretary will answer this simple question when he winds up. What is the reason for that delay? If that measure is so central to Government objectives and to tackling the problems of the underclass that the Chancellor described in his Budget speech, why not introduce it now, or at least during this year? Why wait until April 1996? The unemployed need help now.

A massive waste of talents, resources and skills is inherent in unemployment, but of equal importance is that it costs the taxpayer a pretty penny. The former Secretary of State for Employment, now Secretary of State for Education, told the Employment Select Committee a year ago that it costs £9,000 a year to keep each unemployed person out of work. Every family in the country pays £1,000 a year towards the cost of unemployment—and that, to coin a famous phrase, is not a price worth paying. It has divisive social consequences, which are to be seen in all our constituencies. Increasingly today, we see not just one generation but families in which successive generations have been out of work, which contributes to increasing inequality and growing poverty.

For the first time this century, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening, not narrowing. One great achievement of politicians in all parts of the House in the 20th century has been the narrowing of social inequalities—until now. Today, those inequalities are growing. Sixty-eight per cent. of the work force earn less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold, and their numbers have grown by 1 million during the Tory years.

A low-skill, low-wage, no-hope economy is no future for my constituents or those of Conservative Members. When one considers that 1 million people in work are in such desperate straits that they must take a second job to make ends meet, one wonders what sort of country we are living in. The Government must take action to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, produce a system of fair taxation and ensure that skills training is available to our unemployed constituents.

It is little wonder that there is such a sense of insecurity, even among people in work. For example, home owners face additional monthly bills of £50 on average thanks to Government policy, increased interest rates and negative equity. To heap insult on injury, home owners who become unemployed are to be stripped of their right to housing benefit. It is regrettable that that measure—one of the most important to be announced in the Budget—is also missing from the annual Finance Bill. I hope that the Minister will address that issue in his winding-up speech.

Many of the people who will suffer most grievously as a consequence of their loss of benefit when they become unemployed are precisely those whom the Conservative party claims to represent: small business men and women and the self-employed. How on earth will they take out insurance? What sort of price will they end up paying on their insurance premiums to insure themselves against the risk of being thrown out of work?

Mr. John Maples has become a friend of the Labour party during the past few months. He has become our friend because he managed to tell the truth. He said in his famous leaked memo:

"While we trumpet the recovery, the voters do not think the recession has ended. They still fear unemployment, have no more 'money in their pocket' etc. What we are saying is completely at odds with their experience."

He was right. He was right to say that living standards will not only fall this year, but will go on falling next year. It is not surprising that there is an absence of a feel-good factor.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Milburn: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. He should say so directly to the vice-chairman of the Conservative party, because there it is in the Maples memorandum. Advice is offered directly to Ministers and, indeed, to the Prime Minister, to tell the truth, and make it clear that living standards are falling and that there is a growing sense of insecurity in all our communities. Perhaps most important of all, the increased tax burden that has been promulgated in successive Finance Bills is now beginning to bite, and beginning to bite hard.

The extra taxes that have been introduced will mean that the net income of a typical taxpayer will be some £13.15 a week lower in April 1995 than a year earlier and £20.50 a week lower by April 1996.

Sir George Young: We keep on hearing figures about the average family or the average household. The figures that the hon. Gentleman has just quoted apply to less than 1 per cent. of households. The figure for average households is £2.30 per week.

Mr. Milburn: At least the Minister has the good grace to admit that the average family will feel the effect of tax rises and of economic failure where it hurts most—in their pockets. However, one thing is absolutely clear. The electorate understand that not only are tax bills rising but, as a deliberate matter of policy, the Conservative party is pursuing a policy of unfair taxation.

In 1979, when the poorest fifth of households paid 31 per cent. of their incomes in tax, the richest fifth paid 38 per cent. By 1992, the last year for which figures are available, and incidentally, even before the big tax hikes that we have seen, the tax burden had shifted from the rich to the poor. The poorest fifth of households paid 39 per cent. of their incomes in tax compared with 34 per cent. paid by the richest fifth.

All that takes place against a background of rising public anger about perks for those at the very top. We have heard much recently about the excessive boardroom salaries and perks that have been paid out, especially across the privatised utilities. To remind the House, 50 directors of the privatised utilities have already made more than £1 million out of privatisation. Since privatisation, chairmen of utilities have seen their salaries increase by an average of 220 per cent. But that is nothing to the chairman of BT, because his salary has increased by 700 per cent. At the same time, of course, more than 160,000 jobs have been lost since privatisation began.

The Finance Bill offered Ministers an opportunity to put their money where their mouths were. It offered the Government the chance to advance a fairness agenda; to tackle those excessive rises in salaries and perks for those serving in the boardrooms of the privatised utilities. Yet there is nothing in this Bill about such an approach. That is why my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will table amendments about executive share options and about regulators being required to disregard the costs of excessive executive remuneration when setting price ceilings in the privatised utilities.

The Government's failure to act has obviously incurred a huge political cost. John Maples again made it very clear when he said:

"Although in the 1980s the Conservatives seemed to promise a classless society of opportunity, the reality is now that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer."

That recognition is shared by constituents up and down the country. There is political damage for the Government in that widening gap between rich and poor.

However, there has been a far more damaging social and economic cost. The Government have failed to create the social partnership essential if everyone is to pull together for economic success and, indeed, share in its benefits. The Government could take a lead in ensuring that people become stake holders in their communities. They could take a lead in overcoming the divisions between rich and poor, between employers and employees. I take the view that Britain works best when it works together. But working together is inhibited by bumper pay and perks for the few and falling living standards for the many. The Government have done precisely nothing to tackle executive perks and pay.

The Finance Bill is a missed opportunity. I very much hope that, during our deliberations not only this evening but in Committee, we shall put the Finance Bill on the right track and accommodate the concerns of all our constituents.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Does the hon. Gentleman concede that—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand that, in fact, the hon. Member has completed his speech.

7.37 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): If I cannot intervene, perhaps I can put my point in the following short speech. First, I apologise for not having been present for the entirety of the debate. That has not been possible, but I have been present for the past few speeches, and I have heard how Labour Members have berated our mismanagement of the economy and said that we have not addressed a fairness agenda when we could have done.

Of course, Labour Members have totally forgotten, in looking at this new, unified Budget and the economy overall, that Britain's economy at this time is more successful than it has been at any time during the past 30 years. Economists who lecture at university talk about two sorts of recovery. They talk about the recovery that we see on the high street, led by a boom, with endless spending and doubtless the spin-off of a feel-good factor, and they also speak about the holy grail. They talk about the export-led recovery. That commodity has very rarely been seen in the economic history of Britain over the past 50 years, but our current economic recovery is led by exports, and that is to be commended. The Government have achieved that through tough decisions, and the manufacturing and service sectors have combined to back the economy.

[Mr. Hartley Booth]

As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said, backed by foreign investment, we have achieved what is, after the recession in recent years, a miraculous recovery. I commend the 348 pages of the Finance Bill, because it is built on the back of our current economic success, with its low inflation, low interest rates and falling unemployment.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) was derogatory about our unemployment figures. When Opposition Members talk about the unemployment statistics, they always forget that huge force of people—which it is difficult to describe—known as the black economy. Those people are employed. They may not be paying taxes, but they are employed.

If there is a fudge or a mistake in the official statistics, it goes the other way—in the direction that is inconvenient for the Opposition's arguments. There are probably far more people employed, as a result of the black economy, than people believe. The unemployment statistics have been miscalculated since 1945 and the Attlee Government. Until 1984-85, the unemployment statistics did not include the self-employed. Opposition Members who continue to berate us for fudging the unemployment statistics seem to be unaware that, for 30 or 40 years, those statistics were inaccurate, as they did not include reference to the black economy or the self-employed.

Reference has been made to the absence of a feel-good factor. The hon. Member for Darlington referred to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury indicated dissent earlier. However, in economic language, there is no feel-good factor at this stage. We hope that the feel-good factor will return to our constituents—certainly before the next election.

The hon. Member for Darlington referred to the gap between the rich and the poor. Opposition Members often raise that point. It appears from the statistics that the gap has been widening, but what kind of nation are we if our thoughts and debates are constantly driven by jealousy? That is the only reason for failing to deal with the appropriate factor—absolute poverty.

Conservatives are concerned about absolute poverty. Absolute poverty has not been increasing. Over the past few years, poverty has been eliminated in many parts of the country. That is the quotient we should consider. We came to this House to ensure that absolute poverty was eliminated from all our people.

We are concerned about poverty, but we are not concerned about mere gaps between one set of people who may have been fortunate and others who have not been fortunate. We want to ensure that the less fortunate are helped; that is why the Budget pinpoints the creation of jobs, particularly in relation to small businesses in respect of the work incentive initiatives.

As a result of the prudent management of the economy, and despite the undeniable difficulties that we are experiencing in many parts of Britain, we have been able to raise spending on targeted items in the Budget. We heard from the Dispatch Box today how £1.3 billion extra has been found for the national health service. More spending will be forthcoming for local authorities, the police and law and order. More resources have even been found for European spending, but perhaps I will refer to that in a moment.

There have been prudent cuts, for good reason, in parts of the expenditure—for example, on housing. Before Opposition Members intervene to claim that that is simply terrible—the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a former Housing Minister, is to respond to this debate—I must point out that there are 750,000 empty properties in Britain. As a party and a Government, we are interested in using the national assets and resources of this country efficiently. We want to ensure that houses and other property are used for the benefit of all our people, and particularly the homeless.

I am happy that we have cut some aspects of housing expenditure, providing that, down in Marsham street in the Department responsible for housing, there are endless initiatives to harness the unused properties, particularly for our homeless people. I offer qualified support for that policy.

I referred to European spending in the debate on the Queen's Speech, and I do not apologise for raising it again. When my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary replies to the debate, I hope that he will respond to an issue that is close to my heart. I am concerned about the fact that this country contributes £200 million to overall European spending of £1,000 million on black tobacco.

Black tobacco is part of the common agricultural policy, so it is perhaps not directly related to this debate. However, I would argue that it is legitimate for me to raise the point today. The black tobacco regime is a heinous waste of £200 million of our money, which could be spent on no fewer than three hospitals in this country. That money is also spent wastefully and cruelly, because only about 40 per cent. of it is smoked in Europe. The balance is smoked in the developing parts of the world, and it kills people there because there are no warnings against its use.

I hope for a specific response from the Treasury about my point. I understand that we are bound by European spending rules, but I hope that, the next time that Finance Ministers from this country go to the Council of Ministers on our behalf, they will raise that point about black tobacco. I hope that the table is punched, as we should not be wasting £200 million of British taxpayers' money in that appalling way.

The hon. Member for Darlington said that this Budget was not a Budget for employment, but I believe that employment is at the heart of the Budget.

The Budget package helped by giving £680 million over the next year for work incentives. There were four measures to encourage employers to take on the unemployed. Employers' national insurance contributions will be cut by 0.6 per cent. for people earning less than £205 a week from April this year. Employers who hire someone who has been out of work for two years or more will be able to obtain a full NIC rebate for that person for up to one year, again starting in April. The work trial scheme is being expanded to 150,000 places. A further workstart pilot scheme will be developed, thereby helping 5,000 people.

Four measures are introduced to ease the transition from unemployment to work. In last week's debate, there was an analysis of and support for them. There are two measures for people who want to find full-time work, and three measures to keep unemployed people in touch with the labour market.

Last week, I visited the employment office in Finchley, and I was pleased to hear of local people's success in going back to work. I am pleased to know that, time and again, through the host of initiatives in the Budget, including other initiatives, people are helped to get back to work. The hon. Member for Darlington asserted that we are not concerned about employment. On the contrary, at the very heart of the Budget is concern about and spending on unemployment, in a host of imaginative new policies.

I also commend and support the widening of the 20 per cent. band. The second rise in VAT on fuel was not proceeded with. Opposition Members berated us for not conceding that point sooner, but that was yet another example of the democratic process working. Many Conservative Members loyally supported the Government's attempt to raise VAT on fuel. Indeed, the hypocrisy of Labour Members and of the Liberal Democrats was exposed because, for greenhouse, environmental or whatever reasons, they too would have taxed heating.

Finally, when, as a democratic voice for people, Conservative Members rejected the second round of that VAT rise, I for one supported that rejection, as did many of my constituents. Far from a concession, that was a victory for democracy.

The hon. Member for Darlington mentioned privatisation. Privatisation is not to be characterised just as a way in which the incomes of a few senior executives reach international standards. That is not the true test of privatisation in historical terms. We must look at how—I nearly said "curmudgeonly"—solid, old-fashioned national utilities are suddenly becoming sparkling young companies with a worldwide horizon.

British Gas, electricity companies and water companies are looking around the world for new markets. I have been heartened by the activities of British Gas in Kazakhstan, where I was last summer. Such companies are now doing things for all of us that they would never have dreamt of doing before. They have been freed, thanks to our privatisation policies. We will not have Opposition Members saying that it is yet another excuse for the few to gain too much income.

What is the Labour party's comment on the Bill? I was happy to go on television to make my modest contribution to supporting the Government's proposals in the autumn, and the Labour party spokesman, who was with me, could say nothing except that the Budget was against investment. Time and again, the Labour party spokesman said, "This Budget omits and ignores investment."

Labour Members were unable to count the fact that, through our sensible management of the economy, we have attracted, like a magnet, investment from around the world, and that 40 to 50 per cent. of Japanese and American investment has come to this country. I have heard of double counting, but I have never heard of subtraction counting, which is what the Labour party is into. Labour Members would subtract such investment from around the world from total investment in the United Kingdom. That is wrong, and it should be exposed. I hope that the message will go out from the House tonight.

What is the rest of the Labour party's opposition to our proposals and to the Bill? It is a Trojan horse. Labour Members wish to push their smart-looking wooden edifice into the heart of our citadel. At the heart of their horse they have "spend, spend and spend again" shock troops, who will jump out of the horse at the appropriate time if the electorate ever give them the chance.

On Monday morning, I read an interesting article by the former editor of *The Times*, Lord Rees-Mogg, in which he explained the nature of the dilemma under which Opposition Members labour. Their dilemma is that they have a certain constituency—the welfare constituency—which would drive them onward because it needs public expenditure. Opposition Members may keep their shock troops hidden in their smart-looking horse, but pressure from their constituency is so great that there will be more spending.

That was exemplified in the recent curious happenings in the Labour party over education. While many hon. Members were enjoying their short Christmas break, it was suggested that the Labour party would abolish the VAT concession on education. That suggestion was withdrawn with alacrity, which raised several suspicions among Conservative Members, and not surprisingly.

If the VAT concession was removed, what would happen? If we do our sums, we know that there would be an extra burden of £120 million on the Exchequer, because some people would find it impossible to pay private, broader education bills on top of their taxes. Probably about 20 per cent. of private schools would close. It was not surprising that, just days after it was uttered by the education spokesman, the word was withdrawn, so sincere are Labour Members in wanting to maintain their stance as the Trojan horse for spending.

I know that a number of hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall conclude. The Government's handling of the economy is exemplified by the Bill, by falling unemployment and by export-led recovery. It is to be commended.

8 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): It is a curious and perhaps unique feature of the Bill that so many of the tax increases that will be introduced in the next financial year are not contained in it. It is bizarre that the tax increases announced in December are not yet included in the Bill.

Many of April's tax increases were legislated for in previous Finance Acts, which is unusual. They include the reduction in the married couple's allowance, which will mean that a couple paying tax at only 20 per cent. will be £86 a year worse off after April, and the reduction in mortgage interest tax relief, which will mean that a family with an average mortgage will be £10 a month worse off after April.

Other harsh Budget measures have not been included in the Bill, notably the stripping away of mortgage assistance for those on income support, which will mean that a family with an average mortgage will have to pay £20 a month more in insurance.

Throughout proceedings on the Bill we shall remind Conservative Members of the broader picture and of the many tax increases that those on middle and low incomes have already had to endure. In our campaigning as we approach the general election, we shall remind people—not that they need much reminding—that under Finance Acts since the last general election they have endured the equivalent of a 7p increase in income tax. It is no use the

[Mr. Malcolm Chisholm]

Conservative party expecting people to be grateful when the Government give back a proportion of that 7p in tax bribes over the next two years.

Looking back, we shall remind the public that since the Tories took office almost 16 years ago the richest 1 per cent. of the population have cumulatively gained £75 billion in tax cuts, while the poorest fifth of the population have suffered a rise in their tax contributions from 31 per cent. of income in 1979 to 39 per cent. in 1992. That percentage has risen since, although we do not have a recent figure for it.

Looking ahead, we shall remind people that next year they will be worse off when housing costs are taken into account: they will not need much reminding of that. We shall also drive home the point that next year those on low and middle incomes will have to pay a higher percentage of their income in tax than those on the highest incomes. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that the middle deciles of the population will have to pay another 1.4 per cent. of their income in tax increases while the top decile will have to pay only 0.7 per cent. Indeed, for some of the super-rich in that top decile, the figure will be even lower because of the tax loopholes in the Bill. Before Conservative Members become too excited about the term "tax loopholes", I should point out that I am drawing from an editorial in the *Financial Times*, which described venture capital trusts and the new arrangements for the enterprise investment scheme as tax loopholes.

A broadsheet published by BESt Investment called "Tax Shelter Service" is well worth reading. It was quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) in an earlier debate, but it is worth repeating. That company gives advice on tax shelters and it cannot contain its joy about the measures in the Budget that will help those on high incomes.

I shall quote a couple of sentences from the broadsheet. It states:

"The Budget may have been regarded as 'boring' by most commentators but for the Tax Shelter business it contained arguably the most exciting combination of measures ever seen . . . investors will have no less than four opportunities for sheltering tax: EIS, Enterprise Zone Property, Reinvestment Relief and Venture Capital Trusts. As a result we cannot see why anyone should choose to pay CGT in future."

Thereafter, it goes into the details. There is a liberal spraying of exclamation marks. I do not think that the company can believe its good fortune in having been given so many opportunities to shelter tax.

Apart from the surprises mentioned in the broadsheet, it does not mention measures that have surprised some of us, such as the abolition of the interest-in-land rule for enterprise investment and other schemes. People put money into property under the business expansion scheme and made a killing, but we thought that at least that had now gone for ever. It appears that it has come back through the abolition of the interest-in-land rule. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point when he replies.

Other measures in the Budget will help those at the very top end of the tax scale. For example, inheritance tax allowance has been fully uprated. The rate for those eligible to tax relief on private medical insurance will be maintained at 25 per cent., while the married couple's allowance and mortgage tax relief have gone down to 20 and then to 15 per cent. There are new tax opportunities for those with PEPs and TESSAs.

As the vice-chairman of the Conservative party said—it has been quoted many times before and will be quoted many times again:

"the reality is now that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer."

The same man invented the phrase "killer facts". I remind Conservative Members of a killer fact that, unfortunately, is quite literally true in some cases. It is that 14 million people in this country live on incomes of less than £115 a week. I am referring to one in four of the population, a rise from one in 10 in 1979.

The problems of that group are not addressed by the Bill or by the other Budget measures that are not included in it. Those people are crying out for employment measures to help them into work or tax measures if they work and pay tax. The Budget contained only marginal employment measures, which are more than outweighed by the Budget's negative features.

The Budget offers only crumbs in tax measures. The hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) spoke about the widening of the 20 per cent. band by £200; even in last year's vicious tax-increasing Budget it was widened by £500. Many people do not benefit from that anyway. Those earning £6,000, £5,000 or £4,000 a year do not gain any advantage from the extension of the 20 per cent. band.

What would have helped the poor people in society who pay tax would have been a very large increase in the personal allowance. The Government are proud of the fact that they have increased it by £80 this year. I suppose that that is an improvement on the last two years. The Government actually had to include clauses in previous Finance Bills to break the law of the land—the Rooker-Wise amendment—that laid down that personal allowances had to rise by the rate of inflation. Therefore, I suppose that this year we should be thankful for small mercies.

A person paying tax at the 20 per cent. level will be £20 a year better off following the uprating of the personal allowance, but that does not compensate for the fact that he or she will be £86 a year worse off by the change to the married couple's allowance.

The widow's allowance and the additional personal allowance will be cut, which will affect lone parents. The allowance for the blind has been frozen. The Budget contains no measures to help people on low or middle incomes. I was going to say that we were all grateful that the proposed increase in VAT to 17.5 per cent. was scrapped, but people's campaigning, led by the Labour party, achieved the change. We are pleased that that increase will not be enacted in April.

New measures were introduced to replace the VAT proposal in the mini-Budget. I presume that they will creep into the Finance Bill in Committee. They will lead to increases in indirect taxes, which, again, will have a disproportionate effect on people on low incomes.

I shall not go into details today but, as a Scottish Member, I am especially concerned about the extra tax on whisky. A nip of whisky contains the same amount of alcohol as a glass of wine, yet twice the amount of tax is charged on it. I hope to speak about that matter next week. It was scandalous that the price of beer and whisky went up but that the price of champagne went down. Those

matters must be dealt with in Committee, as must the increase in hydrocarbon oil tax, which many people have discussed in relation to making car ownership more expensive.

The Bill affects public transport and, therefore, members of society on low incomes. In last year's Budget, the fuel rebate for public transport was frozen. This year, the price of diesel has gone up by 5 per cent., to which will be added inflation, plus the extra penny imposed in the December Budget. That will mean more expensive public transport. That will have to be dealt with in Committee.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his mini-Budget statement that there was no alternative, echoing one of his predecessors, but we know that many alternatives exist. A simple alternative for his extra £1 billion would have been a 45p tax rate for income of more than £50,000. Even that, however, would not have been necessary if he had gone much higher and taken money off the super-rich, which would easily have raised the necessary revenue.

Labour Members have raised the issue of a windfall tax on the utilities, which since the beginning of the recession have made profits of £45 billion. The Chancellor somehow thought that that suggestion was unheard of, yet one of his predecessors, Lord Howe, imposed such a tax on banks in 1981. The same argument applies to the utilities today as applied to the banks then.

The Chancellor said that a windfall tax could be only a one-off, so it would not do. We all know that the Conservatives' strategy is based on cutting taxes next year and the year after, so a windfall tax—a one-off for one year—would have adequately covered the shortfall in the Budget.

Labour Members raised the executive share options issue. Share options are not taxed as income. Mention has already been made of the way in which capital gains tax can be avoided—the experts are saying, "Who needs to pay it anyway?" It is even more important, therefore, that executive share options are taxed as income. When shares that have been acquired in that way are sold on, they are liable to capital gains tax. When options are exercised, they should be taxed as income. People sitting on those executive share options are like people who fill in their national lottery card with a special dispensation to score off every single number: they cannot lose.

Many examples have been given. For example, 63 electricity chairmen have £29 million worth of executive share options. The amount of money involved is massive. We know that it is a scandal and action should be taken.

Mr. Booth: Would the hon. Gentleman also condemn share options for workers?

Mr. Chisholm: I am against share options completely; the whole idea of share options is bad.

Mr. Booth: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why, time after time, when share options have been given to the work force, the performance of the company involved—National Freight comes immediately to mind—has improved dramatically and obviously?

Mr. Chisholm: That may be true in certain examples, but we know that, in the vast bulk of examples, no relationship exists between the performance of the company and the share option issue. It may be possible to consider the matter and to make a connection between the two, but in general I am against the principle of share options.

There are other examples of how money could be raised. Last year, during discussions on the Finance Bill, Labour Members raised the issue of tax relief on private medical insurance. I am sure that we shall do so again: it is an easy way of raising £80 million or £90 million.

The Conservative party, however, always looks after a certain section of the population. Nowhere was that made more clear than in the investigation into corporate taxation and how industry was to be financed, which was started by the previous Financial Secretary. Everyone knows that he was acknowledging a problem that we all know exists—the massive increases in dividend payouts. In the mid 1980s, they amounted to only £11 billion but now they amount to more than twice as much. They kept on increasing, even throughout the recession.

Lord Hanson said that such an investigation was unacceptable and made the staggering accusation against the previous Financial Secretary that he was some sort of socialist, but the review of dividend taxation was dropped. There is nothing in the Bill about that crucial matter. As someone has said, it is the dog that did not bark. Something must be done about it and that is why the Labour party is urgently investigating the issue. It is connected with this country's poor investment record in the past year.

Conservative Members have made glowing references to figures that suggest that the economy is doing well. It is certainly doing better than it was, which is not difficult. Last year, however, business investment was only 2 per cent. and, even this week, the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, which has a Conservative majority, told Labour's Treasury spokesmen that it cannot accept the investment predictions for next year.

It is being suggested that I finish my speech, so I shall omit certain things that I wanted to say and raise them in Committee. I want briefly, however, to mention one other disappointing omission. Once again, the Bill says nothing about child care. We introduced a new clause on that matter last year. I notice that the industrial building allowance has been extended to new road building, which I am not happy about. We introduced a new clause last year to extend the industrial building allowance in relation to the provision of child care facilities in workplaces. The Government must certainly deal with the issue of the supply of child care. We shall return to it in Committee.

I shall not go into details on the general economic situation because time is running out. The country's economic position has improved but there are still serious problems. Further problems for the economy are on the horizon because of rising interest rates, increased taxation and reductions in capital expenditure. Many problems exist that should have been dealt with, but unfortunately the Government do not have an economic strategy; they have only an election strategy. The *Financial Times* stated that

"preparation for the mother of all bribes is well in hand."

Everyone can see it but the British people will see through it and the Government will not be the Government much longer.

8.18 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that, in the context of a quotation, even a quotation that I cannot attribute accurately, I may be excused for some unparliamentary language. I think that it was an American President who once observed that a lie is around the world while the truth is getting its boots on. Because of that, it is important that, once again, we reassert the context in which the Finance Bill is set.

The Labour party constantly seeks to denigrate the extent of the country's economic success. We have had economic growth for two and a half successive years. Unemployment has fallen for two years and it is at the lowest rate of any major country in the European Union. We have low inflation—the lowest inflation that I can remember in my lifetime. We have low interest rates and strong exports. Productivity is growing sharply. That is a picture of an economy of which we should be profoundly proud. I certainly have deep pride in it.

My local manufacturers are benefiting exceptionally well from the excellent macro-economic climate. Exporters are doing particularly well. I am glad to say that even my retailers are looking more cheerful than they did a year or two ago. The retail sector is not booming, but it is much stronger. We do not want a boom. We want steady, sustained growth. We do not want the boom-bust cycle from the past. How often we are told that by the Labour party. How good it is to see it being achieved in the British economy. It is fair to say that my construction sector is still a little depressed. However, I believe that the stable conditions that we are creating and the steady improvements that we are bringing about will lead to a steady revival in that sector, too.

What my constituents are looking for from this Finance Bill is simple. They want it to maintain the favourable economic conditions that the Government have created, keep interest rates steady and keep the level of sterling steady so that our exporters can continue to succeed. They also want the Government—I make no apology for this—to reduce levels of taxation in the future. The Bill creates the conditions for precisely that.

I do not say for a minute that I welcome the increases in taxation that are implied in the Bill. I accept them as necessary. In the almost three years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I can remember only one occasion on which I have been lobbied for a reduction in public expenditure. This week and last week I have been lobbied for more public expenditure for transport—for railway services—for the health service, for my education services, for my social services, for my fire service, for my police authority and for my local authority housing department. That is a staggering wish list, which I understand, but which has to be funded. It can be paid for only out of taxation.

It is strange that the only representation on taxation that I have received from my county council, which is responsible for many of the areas of expenditure that I have identified and is run by a Liberal-Labour pact, was for a reduction in taxation. Time and again we hear from our political opponents the list of things on which they wish us to spend more money. Time and again they refuse to see that that money has to be found from the taxpayer. There is one political argument that the Conservative party has not yet quite won. It is the argument that there is no such thing as Government money. There is only taxpayers' money. That simple lesson still has not been learnt, certainly by my county council.

I sincerely hope that the Finance Bill will set the framework for further economic growth and so enable us to reduce public expenditure as a percentage of the gross national product. In that context, I feel that I must accept in the interim the provisions in the Finance Bill to increase taxation. I am tempted to suggest to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who was recently a Minister in the Department of the Environment, that one way of getting round the pressure for public expenditure from our local authorities is to remove the capping limits on local authorities. That would enable them to raise taxes locally and discover how unpopular the business of raising taxes is. It might also enable us to differentiate between well-run Conservative authorities and profligate Labour authorities, but that is a debate for another day.

What increases in taxation does the Finance Bill contain? It contains an increase in beer duty. As a member of the parliamentary beer club, I can only be well aware of the significant increase in cross-border shopping. I am grateful for the assurances that I have received from my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury about the steps being taken to counter that trend through increased surveillance by Customs and Excise. I hope that in future Budgets, reductions or stability in beer duty will be a major priority.

We have seen an increase in the hydrocarbon oil duties. I accept that as part of the price that we must pay to meet our international obligations to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to remember the effect that steadily increasing hydrocarbon oil duties can have on rural areas. I wonder whether in future Budgets we might consider the possibility of introducing a variable vehicle excise duty instead of simply loading duty on to petrol and diesel prices. We could penalise the larger, more expensive, gas-guzzling cars and give those who own the smaller, more economical and environmentally friendly cars an easier ride when it comes to paying vehicle excise duty. That may be an alternative mechanism to increasing hydrocarbon oil duties.

Tobacco duty has been increased. I accept fully that we must cut consumption. I am not one of those who believe that advertising bans have any part to play in cutting consumption. The evidence is that they do not do that. I accept that the price mechanism is one of the best ways of cutting consumption, but we must keep the level of taxation under careful review. Concern has been expressed that the elasticity of demand among the poorer sections of our community may mean that the signals are less effective and the reductions in consumption are proportionally smaller for every increase in price. I have received a large number of representations from local confectioners, tobacconists and newsagents who are worried about the effect on their trade. We need to consider that carefully in future Budgets.

The principle of broadening the tax base should be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I had my own difficulties with the order that we discussed last week to impose VAT on transport, particularly as it might have affected steam railways. I was grateful to receive a parliamentary answer, which specified in pretty

clear terms that the Severn Valley railway would be exempt from the provisions. I am glad that the matter was largely resolved.

My insurance broker is not terribly thrilled about the insurance premium tax, but I support the principle of broadening the tax base. I hope that it will lead to an overall reduction in the general level of taxes in due course.

When the Government explained their proposal to impose VAT on certain new transport facilities within amusement parks and museums, they justified it as closing a loophole. The Finance Bill does precisely that. I am told that it closes some £1.5 billion worth of loopholes over three years. I am pleased that the Government have declined to close one loophole referred to by the shadow Chancellor. He suggested that vast amounts of money could be raised by closing the alleged loophole in executive share options.

I was in the private sector before I came to the House. I twice benefited from modest executive share option schemes. On both occasions I paid income tax on the exercise of those options. I find it difficult to accept that executive share options are anything other than carefully defined by the Inland Revenue and effectively taxed, as I know to my personal cost. Some loophole.

It is a good thing that the Finance Bill does not seek to deal with executive share options because I believe in the principle of broadening share ownership. I was fascinated to hear the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who is just leaving the Chamber to hand his notes to *Hansard*, admit that he was opposed to the principle of share options. There, we may be getting nearer the truth about the Labour party's position on the issue. It opposes the principle. I believe that share options are a vital part of a vibrant capitalist economy. They should be extended to more and more of the work force. Not only the so-called fat cats in the boardrooms, but a large number of the work force in many British businesses benefit from share options.

I would be pleased if the Labour party moved amendments in Committee on executive share options. It would enable Conservative Members to expose the shabby politics of envy which still dominate so much of the Labour party's thinking and which would be so destructive of incentives in our society and economy.

I welcome clauses 82 to 86, which deal with capital allowances or roll-over relief for shipping. The House will be aware of my interest in shipping. I have been involved in the Chamber of Shipping for many years, both before I came to the House and since I joined it. I am regularly lobbied in my constituency by ratings and officers in the Merchant Navy about the importance of assisting that industry to reinvest and employ British seamen. It is a tribute to the Government and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor that the provision for roll-over relief for shipping is in the Finance Bill. It would be a shame if the Government spoilt the shipping provision for a hap'orth of tar.

I hope that the Government will consider the possibility of extending the shipping provision from three to five years. There would be no cost to the Exchequer in doing so, but it would bring the cycle of the shipping industry more into line with the taxation treatment of the industry and enable more effective investment in shipping to take place than the three-year provision would allow.

There are two central tests for this Finance Bill. Does it help business and does it boost employment? The answer to both questions is: yes it does. It will certainly maintain the growing confidence of the business community because of the economic conditions that it will support.

I especially welcome the £600 million worth of transitional relief from business rates. I cannot say that I have received many letters of thanks from my business community for that aspect of the Bill, but I can imagine the letters that I would have received had it not been included. The Government are to be congratulated on that.

I also welcome the variety of schemes to help small businesses. The hon. Member for Leith described the venture capital trust scheme as "a loophole". I see it as one of those vehicles to encourage investment that he called for and I welcome it. I know that the small business community also welcomes the creation of the scheme as well as other aspects of the Bill—especially the fact that more businesses can move to quarterly payments of their PAYE and national insurance contributions, which will make an enormous difference to their cash flow.

It is no wonder that business welcomed the Budget. The president of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce said:

> "Measures to stimulate investment in growing companies are constructive and timely, and broadly in line with what the business community had been seeking. We believe this will lead to growth in the small firms sector. Coupled with the reduction in employers' NICs, we can look forward to continued job creation by small firms".

That is a pretty effective vote of confidence for the Budget and its effects on business.

The Finance Bill will also do much for the unemployed. I welcome some of the provisions, including the fact that employers who take on someone who has been unemployed for more than two years will no longer have to pay national insurance contributions for the first year, which will save about £300 per employee and will be a real incentive to employers to take on the long-term unemployed.

I welcome the fact that employers' national insurance contributions will be cut by 0.6 per cent. for employees earning less than £205 a week. I also welcome the work trial and workstart schemes, which are both part of the package that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor presented in his Budget and will do much to assist the unemployed.

What is the alternative to this Finance Bill? It is clear that Labour has no coherent alternative proposals for the House, apart from its tried and trusted formula of envy and taxation. We have heard time and again from Labour Members about windfall taxes and excess profit taxes. I robustly dispute the fact that those so-called excess and windfall profits exist to be taxed and it is not good enough merely to dismiss the subject, as the hon. Member for Leith just did. If the Opposition are right, such windfall taxes are by their very nature temporary, one-off gains to the Treasury. They could not be regular or part of a coherent strategy for the effective management of the British economy.

I have already discussed executive share options. The shadow Chancellor tries to convey the impression that there is a pot of gold waiting there. Leaving aside the incentive for the work force and the inherent merit of such

[Mr. Peter Luff]

share option schemes, which his proposals would undermine, the money that he thinks is there would not exist if his proposals were implemented.

Higher personal taxation and income tax are the constant cry from the Labour party. We know from experience that cutting the higher rates of personal taxation does not lead to a net loss in revenue to the Treasury. By encouraging people, providing incentives and enabling some people to return to this country who had left for more favourable taxation climates, cutting the higher rate would not decrease total revenue to the Treasury. In one year, higher personal taxation might produce some extra gain, but in the long term it would be a disaster for the country and for the Exchequer.

The Opposition's alternative to the Finance Bill is not a strategy, but a series of cheap debating points and sound bites. What does the Labour party do when it comes to taking decisions on measures such as the Finance Bill? It opposed all our major revenue-raising proposals and public expenditure savings yet, despite its best endeavours, it has made more and more spending commitments. That is a profoundly dishonest approach to politics. It is dishonest to oppose tax increases and public expenditure cuts, while proposing more commitments, without having a strategy to pay for them, and I worry about it.

Labour Members say that they want to tax the undeserving rich. Who are they and how much money would such a tax raise, even if they existed? It is shades of Lord Healey's famous phrase, "making the pips squeak".

I share concerns about increasing differentials in our society. There is a case for saying that some of the differentials are becoming too wide. One can learn that from events in other countries. There is a strong case for saying that the Iranian revolution had as much to do with concern about differentials as with Islamic fundamentalism. That is why some of the other emerging Islamic democracies, such as Tunisia, are taking robust steps to control excessive differentials.

How does one cope with such differentials, which breed jealousy and can undermine the strength and fabric of our society? One does so not by taxing the rich harder and harder, but by encouraging enterprise and job creation. Unemployment makes people poor and the Conservative strategy for coping with it is robust and intellectually coherent, unlike that of the Labour party. Quick-fix solutions, such as the minimum wage, sound good and ease the conscience. I wish that they would work, but they would not. They would destroy jobs, increase poverty and increase the very differentials that the Opposition claim to be attacking. Job creation is the route to ending differentials and this Bill takes a number of very important steps to help build on the Government's fine record—one of the best records in Europe.

On a local note, I am glad that one other measure that the Labour party wants is not in the Bill—some punitive measure for independent schools. Labour Members do not mind terribly what it is. It could be the abolition of charitable status, the imposition of value added tax on fees, or the abolition of the assisted places scheme—anything to try to get at the independent sector. I welcomed Labour's plans to tax independent education at Christmas. I welcomed the plans to abolish the assisted places scheme. They are excellent news and will make my task in my constituency much easier, and I am grateful to Labour for that.

A Front-Bench Opposition spokesman highlighted the fact only today that one school in my constituency derives more benefit from the assisted places scheme than any other independent school in the west midlands. The Opposition thought that that was terrible news, but I welcomed it. It is marvellous news and it means that that fine school can continue to offer a valuable and different—it is not necessarily better—education to many people in my constituency who would not otherwise be able to use it.

I welcome it every time the Opposition talk about taxing independent schools. The more they trumpet their hostility to the independent sector, the more I like it. I hope that they will do so in Committee. I hope that they will table amendments to the Bill along those lines, as that would be good news for me and for my party.

I cannot pretend that I like every aspect of the Bill. Unlike Labour Members, no Conservative likes to increase taxes, but the Finance Bill lies at the heart of a strategy for Britain's continuing economic revival. The measures in it will enable the Government to continue to deliver economic success and export-led growth—that miracle or chimera for which we were looking throughout my childhood and my days as an economics student at university. We have actually achieved the chimera of export-led growth at last. The Bill will underpin the achievement of that miracle. The country has chased it for decades and we must not throw it away now. The Bill will not do so and I commend it to the House.

8.38 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): First, I must associate myself with the remarks that my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) made about my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson). I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) on his tribute to our new hon. Friend. The warmth and sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's tribute were much appreciated by Labour Members. His tribute was generous, sincere and good to hear and I certainly associate myself with the thanks for those remarks.

It would have been much better if some of the Conservative Members who spoke after the hon. Member for Bridlington had been here to hear the candour and honesty with which he accepted the fact that the Budget increased the overall tax burden. It would have done Conservative Members good to hear that, because some of their speeches have not recognised the fact that the Government are increasing the overall tax burden. If there is any doubt about that, let me say that the Chief Secretary honestly admitted it at the Dispatch Box.

Governments should do their best to take the people with them. In so doing, they must exhibit a sense of fairness and try to accommodate people as much as possible. People must not feel that they have been unfairly treated and that the Government are selfish, encourage greediness and do not care about people who are less well off. This Government's actions do not inculcate a sense of fairness and society does not regard them as fair.

I am pleased that the Labour party has said that it will table new clauses to the Bill to give privatised industry regulators new powers to cut prices for millions, where a

regulator thinks that boardroom perks to the fat cats are excessive. I also support the action in subjecting executive share options to income tax. I agree fully with the full disclosure of top salaries, perks and payments in company boardrooms, including encouraging pension funds to vote at company meetings on those issues.

I also support the demand that private companies declare donations to the Conservative party. Everyone knows that donations can be made to various organisations, which then donate them to the Conservative party. No one would deny that.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff). When I study Conservative Members and the political spectrum within their party—the so-called drys and wets—I sometimes think that the wets are not too bad, until I listen to one of them. They are every bit as vindictive, hard line and intolerant towards people who they think do not meet their standards as the others. There are no such thing as drys and wets in the Tory party. They are all the same—hard-line right wingers.

The hon. Member for Worcester mentioned costing, and Conservative Members often cry, "Labour should cost its policies." I remind Conservative Members of Lord Howe's comments when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer in a Conservative Government. He is always praised as having been a successful Chancellor. He said that only a fool in opposition would cost a programme, because only Governments see the books. I am amazed that Conservative Members ask us to cost what we would do when we are not in full possession of the facts in the books.

One item in the Budget demonstrates the vindictiveness to which I referred: the freezing of the blind person's allowance was a petty action. I know a number of blind people. The Government's reputation for helping the handicapped is bad enough. What a petty, vindictive move it was to freeze the blind person's allowance.

Conservative Members claim that theirs is a tax-cutting party. The so-called "tax bombshell" of which the Tories accused the Labour party at the 1992 election was effective, as many of my constituents have told me that they were afraid of that. I do not know how the Government can look us in the face and say that they did not deceive the public at that election, because the Budget increased the overall tax burden. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said, that does not include the mini-Budget, which raised the price of beer by 1p, wine by 5p a bottle, and spirits by 26p a bottle, as well as the price of cigarettes and petrol.

Although that is a more balanced approach to a Budget, it increases the ordinary family's tax burden. I shall not forget the sight of the Chief Secretary at the Dispatch Box defending the Government to the hilt and saying that the Budget would increase the household tax burden by only £2.30. Baroness Thatcher would be shocked to hear a Conservative Minister plead at the Dispatch Box that the Government were raising taxes by only £2.30. What a comedown for the Conservative party.

Mr. Aitken: It is true that, in 1995, taxation for the average family will rise by £2.30 a week. Even after taking that increase into account, 1995 is also the year in which households' real disposable incomes will rise by £5 a week, so the hon. Gentleman should present both sides of the picture fairly. His constituents in Glasgow, Rutherglen will have more real disposable income even after the tax increases introduced in the Budget before last.

Mr. McAvoy: Although the Government claim that they have reduced direct taxes—we can all trot out the figures on that—since 1979 the overall tax take from all sources has increased under the Conservative Government. There can be no dispute about that if all indirect taxes are taken into account.

I am aware of the constraints of time and, despite the fact that I have been sitting in the Chamber for five and a half hours, I shall be considerate towards other colleagues.

I often hear Ministers mention the word "prudent". Since 1979, the proceeds of privatisation have amounted to £77 billion, which has been completely wasted on dole money and all sorts of other giveaways to chief executives of privatised industries. The wasted revenue from oil and the money spent on dole payments are an absolute disgrace.

When I hear the word "probity", I think of a subject which I mentioned earlier—Health Care International, which is the private hospital on Clydebank. The figures vary, but between £15 million and £30 million of public money—or, as the hon. Member for Worcester would say, taxpayers' money—was completely wasted in that private hospital project. To compound the matter, we have now heard that the Secretary of State for Scotland is considering giving another £4 million to whichever company takes over that hospital, which has already cost taxpayers billions of pounds. The Chief Secretary was incautious enough to say that that was a misjudgment by the Secretary of State for Scotland. I doubt whether the Secretary of State for Scotland accepts that, and it will be interesting to see his reaction.

If money were freely available and the Government were a success, there would be no problem. I speak only for my constituency, where I am currently fighting the proposed closure of a maternity hospital that is only 15 years old. It is a brand new hospital with top technology, fantastic staff and a great record, but the Greater Glasgow health board proposes to close it. The driving reason behind its proposal is cost.

Like other hon. Members, I do not recognise the rosy picture that Conservative Members paint, nor do I see a recovery coming. Roll on the next general election, when the Conservatives will pay the price.

8.48 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North-East): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I add my congratulations to those that have already been expressed on both sides of the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) on his thoughtful maiden speech. I must express some surprise at the considerable influence that is apparently wielded among Conservative Back Benchers by the British Amusement Catering Trades Association. I shall be interested to see how that influence is reflected in what happens in Committee.

I should like to consider the fairness of the Government's tax policies—not just those proposed in the Bill but those pursued throughout the past 15 years. It is time for a radical change of direction. My greatest anxiety is shared by the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), who drew attention to the widening chasm between the

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best-off in our society and everyone else. That chasm is due largely to the taxation policies that have been applied in the past 15 years. We cannot allow it to continue to get wider.

In 1979, the percentage of income paid in tax by the best-off 20 per cent. was 38 per cent. whereas the worst-off 20 per cent. paid 31 per cent. of their income in tax. Those proportions have now been more or less reversed, because by 1992—things have gone somewhat further since then—the top 20 per cent. were paying just 34 per cent. of their income in tax whereas the worst-off 20 per cent. were paying 39 per cent. of their income in tax. The worst-off were paying a significantly higher share of their total income in tax. I do not see how that can be defended. The gap is getting wider, because the income of the poorest 10 per cent. is less in real terms than it was in 1979.

According to the Department of Social Security's study of households on below average income, the real income of the bottom tenth in Britain dropped by 17 per cent. between 1979 and 1991-92. The explanation for that and the other changes that have occurred rests with the tax cuts in the 1980s, which benefited the highest earners, while the tax increases of the past few years have hit those on low and middle incomes. The two sets of tax changes have affected different groups—tax cuts affected the best-off whereas tax increases affected the worst-off. That has caused the difficulties.

A survey of the tax winners and losers under the Government was published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in February 1994—perhaps it is the most authoritative source on the subject. It concluded:

"The tax rises which will come into effect in the next two years will reverse many of the tax reductions of the late 1980s. But those who gained from the cuts of the 1990s are not the same people as those who will lose from the increases of the early 1990s.

The total impact . . . will be to make the tax system less progressive. The rich will tend to have gained, the poor to have lost."

The impact on an average family with one average income and two children and a mortgage is such that, in 1979, that family was paying 32.2 per cent. of its earnings in taxes, but following the Budget it will pay 35.6 per cent. That is what is so dreadful, because the tax burden has gone up and the money has overwhelmingly been taken from the least-well-off.

People living in constituencies such as mine have been doubly hit in the past couple of years, because they have paid over the odds in tax increases and have been at the sharp end of the spending cuts. The cut in housing association investment programmes will be a particularly heavy blow to my constituents.

Fifteen years ago, the Conservative party took the view that it could afford to ignore the interests of people living in constituencies like mine and shift more and more of the tax burden on to them. What is now becoming clear, not just to me and my hon. Friends but more widely, is the scale of the damage that has been inflicted on the community in which we live—the one nation of which we are all part, willingly or not.

Much of the problem is due to the shift from direct to indirect taxation. There is a growing school of economic criticism of indirect taxation and few economists now accept that indirect taxation increases have less of a disincentive effect than direct taxation increases. Increases in indirect taxation hammer families and the Government must recognise that their effect is deeply damaging. According to the economic trends survey of last year, Britain is unique among the G7 countries because it is the most heavily dependent on indirect taxation as a share of the total tax take.

The effects of such tax changes are particularly grim when set alongside the well-publicised excesses enjoyed by the people at the top of the privatised utilities in particular. It is hard for people to understand how those who were attracted to senior positions in the gas or water industries at salaries of between £60,000 and £80,000 a year now have to be paid three to five times more because that is what they need in order to be kept by those industries. Why were they not paid those sums prior to privatisation? Why did they not move then to jobs that paid those salaries? The reality is that once people have the power to award themselves enormous sums of money, that is exactly what they will do. The market does not enter into it. Those salaries are the result of the straightforward operation of unfettered greed and are not mitigated by the somewhat unctuous justifications that are made by the beneficiaries.

I am glad that the Confederation of British Industry is considering such high salaries, but I must express an element of scepticism when, as we have been told today, an investigation into that subject is to be carried out by someone who is paid more than £750,000 a year. My constituents and I are concerned that the rules are being made either by those who already receive high salaries or for their benefit. That is wrong.

The taxation policies of the past 15 years have been in hock to wealthy people. They have been able to demand tax cuts for themselves at the expense of everyone else. The damage to our communities, the effect in terms of social alienation, division, crime, economic inefficiency and waste, and the growth of dependence on benefits have been immense. We desperately need a new approach that places justice and fairness at the heart of the system in place of avarice; only then will we start to see a healing of the obvious damage all around us today.

8.56 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to colleagues on both sides of the House for not being present throughout the debate. I am unfortunately suffering from a nasty bout of flu which seems to doing the rounds on the Isle of Wight. I should also declare that in the Register of Members' Interests I state that I advise the National Association of Holiday Centres.

The Finance Bills of the past couple of years have followed an amalgamated Budget and have been coupled with the announcement of a control total for public expenditure. I commend my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on the way in which he has ensured that public expenditure has fitted in with that control total. Long before I came to the House it always puzzled me how it was possible for every other organisation in Britain to fix its expenditure and its revenue raising, except Her Majesty's Government. If one revolution has befallen the Treasury in recent years that will be to the benefit of all the citizens of our nation and lead to sounder finance in future, it is the amalgamation of expenditure and taxation Budgets and the new control total arrangements.

I was pleased to note that at long last we are to try to tackle benefit fraud by electronic means. That is long overdue; all of us who represent seaside constituencies know about the "green giro culture". The number of times that girocheques go missing in the lodging house system is a serious problem. There must be a better way of ensuring that public expenditure, where it is necessary, gets through to the individual claimants and is not misused, as has been the case with the existing system.

I am also especially pleased to note that £600 million more is to be spent on the national health service, having been released through efficiency savings in the health service, and that the Government have honoured the election pledge to ensure that there is real growth in health expenditure.

I wish to make specific mention of the first year's full national insurance rebate to employers for taking on anyone who has been unemployed for more than two years, which will be introduced in April 1996. I and Mr. David Guy, then acting chairman of the Isle of Wight training and enterprise council, visited my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) shortly after he had become Secretary of State for Employment and made that very proposal to him. Although we did not frame the proposal in precisely the details in which it is now set out, we suggested to my right hon. Friend that an opportunity existed to give a financial incentive to employers to take long-term unemployed people off the unemployment register. We presented him with a well worked out scheme. I am sure that the measure was not solely the initiative of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight or David Guy, although he is a respected and knowledgeable local business man, but I am pleased that we played a small part in suggesting it at an early stage. I am also pleased that there will be a back to work bonus, which will be tax free, and I am sure that it will be very worth while in trying to tackle the significant problem that we have as a nation—the core of long-term unemployment.

With regard to vehicle excise duty, and the consultation paper to be issued in relation to its extension to the possession of vehicles rather than only those that are on the highway, it has long been a practice in this country that people sometimes license their vehicles for the summer only, for their runs to the seaside and days out, and lay them up in winter. It has always been the law that, provided that they are not on the Queen's highway, people do not have to purchase a vehicle excise duty licence for their vehicles. I am also amazed to find how many people in this country own a second vehicle, which is not regularly taxed and used on the highway. I have had considerable correspondence from my constituents about that, and I warn my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that we are playing with fire on that issue.

It might be much more sensible if we went down the Swiss route and each had our own personal licence plates, which we carried with us from vehicle to vehicle, rather than persisting in the present rather outmoded form of taxation, if I may so describe it, which is incredibly costly to administer and falls into the category of unenforceable legislation along with dog licences and television licences. We have done away with the first of those, and the time is long overdue to reform the remaining two, which are also more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Anyone who doubts that has only to consider the amount of money that the Treasury took in during one of our famous petrol energy crises and one had to produce a vehicle logbook with a current licence to obtain one's petrol rationing cards. The Treasury immediately took in a staggering amount of money—I believe that it was nearly £0.5 billion. I stand to be corrected on the exact figure, but it was certainly an extraordinary amount of money.

As we speak, our constituents throughout the United Kingdom are receiving the new rating valuations from the rating officer. I was pleased to note that transitional relief is continuing. I referred to that in correspondence with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury long before the revaluation. However, I must tell him that, remarkably, after one of the most bruising recessions that British industry and business have ever experienced, some of the valuations are substantially greater than the previous figures. I hope to meet the Minister's colleague to discuss that matter as I wonder what is going on.

Having had the honour, albeit briefly, to be Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, I can say that we look forward to the landfill levy. The Treasury cannot bring itself to call it a levy—it is a landfill tax. As always, the new tax brings with it a danger, and we shall have to keep a wary eye out for fly tipping in the countryside.

I am pleased, both personally and for the venture capital industry, that we have extended reinvestment relief and taken away the nonsense about the percentage of property ownership within the qualifying companies. That is welcome, but the scheme has not had nearly enough publicity. I do not think that people, particularly small business men, understand that they can sell their businesses and not pay one ha'penny of capital gains tax. The message has not got through. Even some accountants do not seem fully to understand the mechanism, which will be extended by the Finance Bill. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary will address that point in due course. We shall also shortly see self-assessment—itself a revolution in taxation in this country.

My final subject, which falls within schedule 3, has already been mentioned—that of amusement machines. That provision fulfils Field's first and second laws of legislation. Field's first law of legislation is that all legislation comes long after the event and long after the concern has passed into the mists of time. The fact that video games have only just penetrated the consciousness of the Treasury exactly fulfils my first law of legislation.

Field's second law of legislation is that all legislation has absolutely the opposite effect of that intended. The taxation of video game machines will ensure that they are driven out of the amusement arcades along our seafronts. They will be replaced by more gaming machines—exactly the concern that people have about amusement arcades and their influence on young people. The effect will thus be the reverse of that intended. I have to declare an interest in that I have a space invader machine in my living room as I was a bit of an addict in my day.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Does my hon. Friend agree that the introduction of the proposed taxation system on video machines may not yield the revenue that the Treasury has predicted? Video machines are reputed not to produce sufficient funds to justify their continued existence, which may lead to their removal by many operators and therefore to the yield being substantially less than that anticipated by my right hon. Friend the

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Chief Secretary. Does my hon. Friend think, therefore, that there is a case for reinvestigating that subject to see whether it would be appropriate to ease the taxation to ensure that it is set at a level which is justifiable and yields the expected sums?

Mr. Field: Not only was that intervention timely, but it comes from a former chairman of the Association of District Councils and distinguished leader of Bournemouth council, which was one of the first seaside authorities in the United Kingdom to put specialist meters on the machines in its amusement arcades so that the authority could prove to the Customs and Excise precisely how much money the machines were generating. That was a revolution in the arcade industry at the time and one or two people who were taking a couple of shillings out of the back of the machines thought that it would be their undoing. It illustrates the point that a local authority in the United Kingdom has the information to prove to the Customs and Excise, and therefore the Treasury, just how little some of the machines yield. My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point when he says that the provision may have the opposite effect to that intended.

I conclude by quoting the National Association of Holiday Centres Ltd, which includes Butlin's and similar organisations. It said:

"The new tax will have a devastating effect on the industry reducing significantly the number of amusement machines sited in such places as amusement arcades, holiday and caravan parks, indeed putting some out of business. Far from generating the revenue for the Exchequer we believe the overall effect will be to reduce revenues taking into account loss of expected duty and existing VAT from machines sited, loss of corporation tax, PAYE and NI contributions from those companies making redundancies or going out of business and loss of duty on machines imported into this country".

I point out that most of our resorts do not open all year round—they are fairly short-term operations. As knowledgeable as he is, I cannot believe that my right hon. Friend believes that United Kingdom resorts have done so well that they need a tax of this sort in the current economic climate and as they come out of recession.

9.10 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Like the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), I apologise for my absence during most of the debate today. Unlike him, my absence was due to attending to other parliamentary duties. I thank the hon. Gentleman for keeping his speech to a reasonable length. I also thank my two hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) and for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), who spoke before him, and I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Whips for enabling me to make a short contribution to the debate.

When I spoke in the Budget debate, the Chief Secretary, who is in the Chamber, was kind enough to say that he thought that I had made a good speech, but that it was a little too long. I cannot guarantee the quality of my speech tonight, but I can assure the Minister that he will be well satisfied with the quantity.

I wish to speak, more in sadness than in anger on this occasion, about only one subject: something is missing from the Budget, as it has been missing from the previous three. The Government have not addressed the anomaly of charities being unable to redeem value added tax payments. That is a quite serious problem.

Like many other people, I would like to live in a world where charities were not necessary. That would be wonderful, but it is never likely to happen. Indeed, the Government's policies have increased the pressure on charities that are subsidising services which should be provided by the state. Under those circumstances, I expected the Government to show a little more sympathy when considering the needs of charities.

More than £300 million in VAT payments is collected—wrongly, in my view—from charities each year. Charities do not make profits; they provide services. They exist only because people are prepared to give either of their money or of their time. It is wrong that people who take a Christian attitude towards life should find themselves unwitting tax collectors for the Government. That is morally wrong, and I hope that the Government will address that issue in Committee.

The services provided by charities are either exempt according to European Union legislation, or they fall outside the scope of VAT; yet we have a ridiculous situation whereby VAT is still being collected. At best, that could be described as a form of robbery.

What is worse is that local authorities, health authorities, boards and trusts that provide contracted-out services can receive full recovery of VAT upon their services. Obviously, that is wrong. What applies for local authorities and health authorities should apply for charities, because there are many parallels.

I accept that not all charities are what they seem. I believe that some charities are little more than extensions of certain vested interests. But that is a discussion for another time and place. The vast majority of charities—those which provide services for the disabled, the poor, the old and the disadvantaged—are admirable. As long as they are needed, they should receive preferential treatment, not inferior treatment from the Government. Up to 10 per cent. of what is collected by charities to carry out good works is being lost in VAT that is not recoverable. That is totally unacceptable, particularly at a time when there is no real increase in the amount of money being given to charities, and more pressure is being put upon them because of various constraints on public expenditure and local authorities and the NHS being unable to provide services. I hope that the matter will be examined more seriously. If people eventually decide not to give their time or money to charities, the taxpayer will have to pay much more.

On 11 January, the House debated VAT on historic tramways and railways. I hope that it is muddled thinking on the part of the Government and nothing worse, but they are completely out of step with reality in their attitude towards VAT and those involved in providing charitable services.

Mr. Thomason: Can the hon. Gentleman explain how he would seek to differentiate between the trading activities of charities, which are in direct competition with others who are paying VAT, and the non-trading activities of charities for which he would argue that relief was appropriate?

Mr. Etherington: I am not trying to avoid the question, but I am short of time. I accept that the hon. Gentleman

raises a fair point. My answer is that I would do that with some difficulty. It is a problem, just as it is difficult to decide what is a bona fide charity on moral grounds rather than on strict legal terms. I cannot say much more than that. I agree that the problem needs to be addressed, but it could be overcome if the will were there.

It was originally the intention to put VAT on private railways, almost all of which are based on a charitable concept. They are not profit-making organisations; they provide a service and keep part of our heritage intact. The national tramway museum at Crich is a national asset and should be paid for by the Government, but it is not. Because of their muddled thinking on VAT, the museum will have to find an extra £35,000 a year. If it were a railway and not a museum, or if it did not provide rides on trams, it would not have that problem.

It is all part of the same muddled thinking. I wish to bring it to the Minister's attention to see whether some of the problems can be put right. We are not talking about vast sums of money. Relief from VAT for charities will not bankrupt the country. After the recent fiasco on VAT, one prominent Minister stated that it required only another 1p on income tax. I admired him for saying that. We are talking about a problem that is nothing like as large, but probably could be dealt with by consequential adjustment.

I hope that the Minister will take on board the two points that I have raised and I thank you once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your tolerance.

9.18 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) for being brief, and to other hon. Members who have curtailed their remarks so that all those who wished to contribute to the debate were able to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North made some useful points about charities, to which we will return in Committee.

The Finance Bill should be the cornerstone of the Government's economic and, therefore, political strategy and we are entitled to examine it to see where they are going and to identify their sense of direction and purpose—if they have one any more. We look in vain, because the debate has told us what the Opposition already suspected—that the Government have only one objective: to win the next election at whatever cost. All their efforts will go into promoting the interests of the Conservative party; the interests of the country will take second place every time. It is a short-term aim from a short-term Government and their policy is what we have now come to expect.

Conservative Members believe still that all they need do is cut the basic rate of income tax and they will win. That will not work. The Conservatives fought the 1992 general election on the specific pledge not to introduce in last November's Budget tax rises equivalent to 7p in the pound—the biggest in Britain's history.

At the last election, the Government promised that they would not have to increase taxes. Until last autumn, the Chancellor told us that whatever he said on a wet night in Dudley did not matter. In December, he got a resounding answer from the people of Dudley. This afternoon, we heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the new Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson), who not only paid a generous tribute to his predecessor, Dr. John Blackburn, but showed that he has a substantial knowledge of business—a knowledge sadly lacking among a number of Conservative Members. I am glad that my hon. Friend has agreed to serve on the Committee that is to consider the Bill.

As the Prime Minister made clear yesterday, at a Conservative party event hosted at public expense at Downing street, all the Government's efforts are geared to 1996. Even their limited help for the long-term unemployed will not come into play until April 1996, because the Government want a drop in unemployment in the summer of that year—not in the summer of 1995, when the public might forget all about it. The needs of the long-term unemployed take second place to the cynical needs of the Tory electoral cycle. This tired and discredited Government have only one card left to play—cutting the basic rate of income tax by a few pence regardless of the consequences. That will not work either, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said.

Let us examine some of the killer facts about which we have heard so much. Where better to start than the Maples report prepared by the deputy chairman of the Tory party. He said that

"the reality is now that the rich are getting richer on the backs of the rest, who are getting poorer."

Reference to that growing division was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms). The killer facts about tax are simple and well understood. Killer fact No. 1 is that the British people have been landed with the biggest tax increase in Britain's history, equivalent to 7p in the pound, and that they pay value added tax on domestic fuel for the first time ever. The public will remember that the Conservatives threatened to increase that tax to 17.5 per cent. At the next general election, the public will have every reason to believe that if the Conservatives are returned to power, they will increase VAT again.

It is no use the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend)—who is not in his place—moaning, as he does regularly, about the Government's tendency to increase tax and their failure to curtail public spending, because it is at the same level now as 16 years ago. The Tories never have been and are not the party of low tax. They tax for the wrong reason—economic failure.

Killer fact No. 2 is that families pay more of their income in tax than at any time since the Conservatives first came to power in 1979, and they will have to pay more yet again from April.

Killer fact No. 3 is that public spending is the same now as in 1979. The Secretary of State for Wales complained about that two weekends ago, yet he does not seem to realise that he has been supporting a Government who have not kept even that foolish promise made 16 years ago—all that from a Government who said that they would not increase taxes because they had no need to do so.

The gap between the highest and lowest-paid worker is greater than at any time since records began in 1886. Unfairness is a hallmark of Tory tax policy. For all the criticisms that we hear from Conservative Members about a minimum wage, Government policy means that the taxpayer is subsidising bad employers. We pay for that, and there can never be any justification for it. The Government believe that there is no floor below which wages should not be allowed to fall.

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

No wonder the Maples report stated:

"There is a feeling of powerlessness and insecurity about jobs, housing, health service, business, family values and crime."

If the Tories plan a giveaway Budget in 1995, they will be quite prepared to increase interest rates before that to calm the markets. The markets remember the inflationary effects of the Lawson boom that started in 1988.

The Chancellor, as is his wont, was disarmingly frank during the Budget debates towards the end of last year because he made it clear that decisions on interest rate rises would, among other things, depend on political considerations. There we have it. Despite all the talk of openness, of monetary responsibility and of publishing minutes and so on, at the end of the day, there is only one objective: Tory electoral gain.

The Governor's advice on interest rates will be swept aside—that may please my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies)—if it stands in the way of the Tory election strategy. The Chancellor has made it clear that he is quite prepared to do that because the Government have no strategy for the country. Their only strategy is self-interest.

The Government have no strategy for investment. Of course the economy is beginning to recover, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) said, people have yet to feel it. That is because the United Kingdom had the deepest recession of any European country in 1991 and 1992, which is why the UK's growth in the past couple of years has been stronger than it may otherwise have been—not because, somehow, the Conservatives have managed to manage the economy more effectively. It is because we are emerging from the deepest recession that we have experienced.

When one considers the Tory record over 16 years, one sees that we have had the lowest growth rate of any major European country in G7 and we still have the fear of inflation. Those Conservative Members who claim that we live in a climate of low inflation and that somehow it is here to stay do not realise that there is a very real risk that inflation will start to rise as the capacity of the economy is used up because the Government have run down the manufacturing capacity of the economy over the past 15 or 16 years.

Let us look at two more Maples killer facts. Output is now only 2.5 per cent. higher than it was before the recession began. Manufacturing output is still lower than it was at the beginning of 1990. Investment in plant and machinery, a key indicator, is 30 per cent. lower than at the start of 1990.

What do the Government have to offer? In his speech, the Chief Secretary made a lot about tax loopholes and he claimed that the Chancellor was attempting to close some tax loopholes in his Budget. Indeed, the Chancellor closed some tax loopholes, just three weeks after the same Chief Secretary said that there were no tax loopholes to close. The fact is that there are tax loopholes to close if the Government choose to close them.

Let us look at the flagship policy of the Budget—it must have been the flagship policy because it was the only policy which warranted a separate press release on the day of the Budget—which was the proposal to establish venture capital trusts: son of the discredited business expansion scheme, the granny farmers charter. Savings should be encouraged because, without them, there will be no money for investment. But, if the Government are going to intervene to use taxpayers' money to encourage saving and investment, they should do it properly and effectively.

Venture capital trusts will provide one of the biggest tax breaks that this country has ever seen. They will enable people, as has been said, to avoid paying tax, yet there is no guarantee that the investment will go where it is needed. Indeed, it is likely—all the experts and advisers say this—that it will go to the easy options, to the places where the investment would have gone anyway, regardless of any incentive. We the taxpayers will subsidise the granny farmers of this country. The hon. Member for Bridlington called it tax concessions. I do not care whether he calls it concessions or tax breaks; the fact is that we will pay for it.

The Government's profligacy on tax relief beggars belief. Why, for example, did not they try to target that investment? They could have considered corporate venture capital trusts, which might have encouraged private investment and partnership with public money in rebuilding infrastructure or encouraged investment in high technology or in the high-risk areas that the country needs. No mention was made, for example, of regional development, which we think is so important. The Government's first thought was not for investment in the public interest but for those who want to avoid paying tax.

We shall table amendments to ensure that investment goes where it is needed—into areas where there is a risk, the very areas in which Britain should be competing. Indeed, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) mentioned a proposal to taper capital gains tax to encourage long-term attitudes. We suggested that and we support it, yet we see nothing.

What about the Government's private finance initiative? It seems to have run into the sand. Since the initiative was announced in 1992, only £500,000 of private capital has been levered into public sector projects. At the same time, however, Government investment is expected to be £4.5 billion lower than in the past two financial years. In other words, there is a cut in investment. In his Budget statement last autumn, the Chancellor announced reductions in capital expenditure, particularly in housing and road building. Rail investment, about which we have heard so much, has already been cut.

The Government do not understand how to use incentives in the public interest, but they have a very sympathetic ear for those who are ready to exploit every incentive for private gain. They continue to turn a blind eye to the activities of a greedy minority of executives who insist on paying themselves more for doing less.

The hon. Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) said that all that was happening in the privatised utilities—in the gas and electricity industries—was that people were bringing themselves up to world standards. When services come up to world standards and prices come down to world standards, those people can begin to consider paying themselves for effort. However, when we consider that the salary of the chairman of North West Water has risen 571 per cent., we wonder how on earth the Government can justify such figures.

We welcome the CBI initiative to set up a working party to encourage better corporate governance. Effective corporate governance might be the best way to resolve the problem. We believe that those who work hard, and the

companies that grow, should be rewarded for their efforts provided that it is quite clear that they are being rewarded for increased effort and increased productivity. We believe that employees should be rewarded by share options, provided that those share options are earned and not simply given as a super-bonus. Those rewards should be available from the boardroom to the shop floor.

It is typical of this Government that when the Institute of Directors, which is not normally an ally of the Labour party, the CBI and the Labour party call for action, the Government do absolutely nothing. What has happened to the Cabinet sub-committee that was set up to deal with that matter? It has still to report, but perhaps it has been wound up. Lord Hanson said that the dividend study set up by the previous Financial Secretary should be stopped; perhaps Lord Hanson has told the Prime Minister to stop the current exercise as well. Perhaps rather too many Ministers intend to sit in those same boardrooms and claim the bloated salaries and share options that we have seen in the privatised utilities.

The Government have no strategy for growth. Let us consider another killer fact: the United Kingdom's growth record since 1979 is poor. It is lower than any other major European country or G7 country. What are the Government proposing? They do not propose to invest in education. Is it not ridiculous that, when we have 3 million unemployed people, we have skill shortages, which mean that inflationary pay increases are given to some while others go without work?

Cuts in local government spending will undoubtedly mean cuts in education and in the number of teachers in schools. The hon. Member for Bridlington should bear that in mind. We will see savage cuts in local authority spending, of which the Government will wash their hands.

That is no way in which to invest in the future. Without growth, public spending will never be reduced. The fact that we have high unemployment is one reason why Government borrowing has been so substantial.

The Government's competition policy is equally blinkered and confused. Mention has been made of the tax consequences on the brewing and whisky industries, which are major employers and major revenue earners for this country. The illegal importation of drink and the bootleg trade are flourishing, yet the Government have cut the number of people employed in Customs and Excise.

The Government talk about deregulation, but the Bill proposes to extend vehicle excise duty in a way that will strangle businesses in red tape. The proposals for self-assessment of tax, which we welcome in principle, appear to be drowning in volumes of paperwork and confusion. If the proposals simplify matters, then all to the good. However, with confusion and uncertainty will come scope for evasion.

People will also make honest mistakes. There seems to be no procedure for resolving those mistakes and misunderstandings. We need simply look at the forms in circulation from the Department of Social Security to see the complications that the Government have managed to create for people.

I hope that the Government will take to heart hon. Members' criticisms about the need to try to simplify future Finance Bills. Much legislation that is now going through Parliament has not been sufficiently scrutinised simply because of the volume of it and the lack of time available.

The Government have no realistic strategy for the country. They should know that we cannot compete in this world on low wages and low skills. We can compete on excellence and on goods that offer added value. The financial services industry pays well and it competes around the globe, as do the car manufacturing and electronics industries. Inward investors are looking for motivated and skilled work forces. We will not have them by driving down wages and depending heavily on casual labour. To succeed, we need a highly motivated and highly skilled work force.

The Government have no policy for maintaining the social fabric of this country. They are keen to lecture others on their behaviour and they are keen to lament falling standards, yet they turn a blind eye to the consequences of their policies over the past 16 years.

We believe that economic efficiency and social justice go hand in hand. We all live in the same society—what happens to our neighbour matters in social and economic terms—yet, in the past two weeks, the Secretaries of State for Social Security, for Employment and for Wales, all of whom increasingly appear to see this country from a different planet, have been repeating their message that, in order to succeed, expectations must be suppressed, standards must fall and society and the idea of it must be denigrated. They say that people are no different from any other commodity at the disposal of the market.

It is no wonder, therefore, that most people see the Government as out of touch with reality and their own experience of life. We see that in the Government's attitude to helping those who have lost their jobs and who cannot pay their mortgages. They do not seem to realise the cost of insuring mortgage repayments and the fact that, increasingly, insurers will either not insure people or will demand premiums that are out of the reach of ordinary people.

We see the same blinkered attitude with the proposal to use the tenant as the battering ram against high rents. It will take more than a small reduction in the basic rate of tax to win back support for the Government. People are uncertain and fearful; they fear for their jobs. Everyone knows someone who has lost his or her job and who has little prospect of finding another. We have a new generation of young people who have never known a long-term, steady job in their lives. Sadly, it appears that, under the Government, they never will.

We see a new phenomenon of people in middle management who have been laid off in their 40s and who are unlikely ever again to find a full-time job. We know the consequences of that not just in social tension but in economic terms and what it will mean in terms of pension contributions and support that might be necessary in future. People fear for their jobs. They see full-time jobs become part-time jobs, or even no job at all. They fear for their pensions and security in their old age. They fear for their children and for their education. Increasingly, people fear for their safety at home. Nearly everyone now knows somebody who has been a victim of crime.

People see Cabinet Ministers who regard the country as a test bed for ever more unpleasant and fanciful ideology. They see a country that is increasingly run by a rotten state of quangos stuffed with Tory nominees. They do not trust the Government. They do not believe anything that the Government say and, deep down, the Government and their supporters now know that. The Government have no sense of direction. They have no

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

purpose in remaining in office. They live for the moment, and they have run out of steam. The Finance Bill shows that, and it deserves to be rejected.

9.38 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): Much has already been written and spoken about this year's Finance Bill. Perhaps the most cryptic comment was that of a tax partner reported in *The Daily Telegraph* of 7 January, who commented:

"the Bill is too long but also too short."

Another tax partner was even blunter:

"I opened the Bill, blinked, and shut it. Then I looked again and saw clause 3 which was about alcoholic ingredients relief. Clause 4 was about denatured alcohol. At that point I decided what was needed and disappeared."

Hon. Members have added their own comments in today's debate, and I shall try to deal with some of them, but the debate has also been useful in highlighting specific issues on which I am sure that the Standing Committee will want to focus.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) started by saying that the Bill was damaging and divisive, but his speech did not sustain that remark. He mentioned two issues and I want to deal with both. The first was the blind person's allowance, but what he did not mention was that it was doubled in 1990-91 from £540 to £1,080 and then further increased to £1,200 in 1994-95.

Before the hon. Gentleman presses us to far on that allowance, he might like to reflect on the fact that it is of no benefit to blind people whose incomes are not high enough. It is also somewhat restrictive in that it does not help the partially sighted. There may be better ways to help the blind and partially sighted than focusing exclusively on the blind person's allowance. It is more conventional to use the social security system to help people with that sort of disability.

The hon. Gentleman's second point was on the impact of the deep discount provisions in clauses 76 and 77. He conceded that there were good grounds for closing the loophole, but he was worried about the impact on housing associations. I have received and am carefully considering representations from housing associations whose borrowing is a very small percentage of the borrowing that will be affected by the clauses.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of simplifying the tax system; indeed, that has been a theme throughout the debate and I shall say a word or two about that in a moment. He was wrong in what he said about those who did not want to go the whole distance with self-assessment. They have the option of not calculating the liability and instead completing their tax returns broadly as they do at the moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) again spoke about the complexity of legislation. One significant development in that area is the formation of a high-level committee—the tax law review committee—by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. That committee brings together a wide range of talent, with members drawn from industry, commerce, academia, the judiciary and retired civil servants, under the presidency of Lord Howe but with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) also a member.

The committee has set itself an initial programme of three projects all going to the very structural foundations of the present tax code. Perhaps of most relevance to our debate is its project to rewrite part of the existing code in shorter, simpler, more user-friendly terms. That is designed to test whether it would be feasible to recast all or most of the current tax code in that way. The Government are following that work with close interest and the Inland Revenue is giving the committee its full, active and enthusiastic support.

I do not think that there are any easy answers. It has taken more than 100 years to build up the existing body of tax law and any wide-ranging rewrite will be a major task. However, I hope that there is real potential for some worthwhile changes in the way that tax provisions are formulated.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made a rather nostalgic speech. He spoke of the good old days of fine tuning, domestic credit expansion and monetarism. He needs to reflect on the outcome of those policies, especially those that ended in 1979, compared with the policies that were so commendably described by the Select Committee in its report published a few days ago.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I simply made the point that we were still in the era of fine tuning. Every month, the Chancellor sits with the Governor of the Bank of England fine-tuning the British economy.

Sir George Young: Another point on which the right hon. Gentleman was not quite accurate was when he said that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor had handed over control to the Governor of the Bank of England. He has not—my right hon. and learned Friend makes the decisions. However, it is now a much more open process than previously and the Governor has some discretion on timing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) and others of my hon. Friends referred to capital gains tax and pressed the case for reform. With a Budget that is broadly neutral there would be difficulties in making a major radical change in CGT. My hon. Friends should remember that CGT performs an essential role in preventing tax avoidance. Without it, or even with it at a very low rate, there would be a strong incentive for artificial schemes to convert income into capital gains. The CGT rate is 40 per cent., in line with the higher rate of income tax. There is no significant anomaly in that.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said that the tax level was too high, but he made no real suggestion on how he would make significant cuts in public expenditure. He can examine the Government's hospitality expenditure, but there are no major savings to be made there. He said that he would vote against the Government because of—in his words—their failed economic policies. Does the hon. Gentleman recognise the following words? It is stated that

"the economy is now recovering strongly. Inflation is at its lowest level since the 1960s, and relatively stable. The PSBR is falling and there has been a substantial improvement in the current account. GDP has been growing above its trend rate for over a year, and is forecast to continue to do so for some time without exerting upward pressure on prices. Registered unemployment has been falling since the winter of 1992-93."

The quote is from the third report of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service. The hon. Gentleman added his name to that report. It is difficult to understand how he sustains the argument that a week ago it was all so good but somehow today it is all so bad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) paid tribute to the small business measures in the Bill. He rightly made the point that the shape of the recovery is different from that of other recoveries in that it is investment and export led.

We then had the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson). He paid a generous tribute to John Blackburn which was well received by hon. Members on both sides of the House. He described the changing demographic and industrial nature of his constituency. A few years ago, I worked with the hon. Gentleman on the urban trust, which helped to fund small, worthwhile projects in inner cities.

It was clear from the hon. Gentleman's speech that he retains an interest in the promotion of small businesses. I do not want to cause him any difficulties on the occasion of his maiden speech, but the tone of his description of venture capital trusts was significantly different from that of his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central. The hon. Member for Dudley, West said that he welcomed the purpose behind the establishment of VCTs. One would not expect him in his maiden speech to launch a frontal attack on his Front-Bench spokesman, but he has some useful ideas on the role of tax incentives in promoting business and partnerships. We would welcome him if he were to serve on the Committee that considers the Bill.

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman is being a little bit unfair to my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson). All of us welcome the idea of encouraging investment and of saving. Our complaint about the VCT device is that it simply provides a tax break and that it will not channel investment where it is needed.

Sir George Young: I hope to say more about venture capital trusts in a moment, but the Labour party is making a big mistake in launching its frontal attack on VCTs, which offer the potential to help growing businesses and to create more jobs. Everyone who has considered the issue agrees that a funding problem exists for small businesses that want to get out of the nursery. VCTs are the result of much consultation. They have been broadly welcomed. The Labour party is ill advised to come out against them at this early stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said that public expenditure was too high and that the Bill was too long. He will recognise that, in the past two public expenditure rounds, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor have taken some £42 billion off planned public expenditure. On shorter Finance Bills, a moment ago I mentioned the possibility of simplifying the legislation.

The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), who is not in his place at the moment, gave us a lecture on how and when to cut taxes. As the Labour party voted against nearly all the tax cuts in the 1980s, I am not sure that that is a subject on which it can give lectures. We treat the advice with some caution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), a Member representing a coastal region, spoke about cross-border shopping. As she knows, cross-border shopping is closely monitored. More than 250 customs staff are on single market duties, the majority acting against smuggling. The Government will continue to work with their European Union partners towards closer approximation of duties. The forthcoming review of EU-wide excise duties will give us the first opportunity.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will the Minister give way?

Sir George Young: No. I do not think that my hon. Friend has been here during the debate and, out of courtesy to hon. Members who have asked specific questions, I should like to make some progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye made the point that venture capital trusts should be focused on smaller companies. She will know that we have put a £1 million limit on subscriptions to achieve that objective.

A number of hon. Members, mainly Opposition Members, asked about work incentives. They said that there was nothing in the Bill to create jobs, but there is—the venture capital trusts. The major work incentive proposals, however, are working social security proposals. That is why they are not in the Finance Bill.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) asked why measures to help the long-term unemployed were not introduced sooner, but his concerns were overstated. The 0.6 per cent. cut in employers' national insurance rates for the low-paid starts this April. The extra £10 per week for family credit claimants who work full time starts in July. Together, those two major measures are worth £340 million in 1995-96. Extra provisions are also being made in 1995-96 for more work trials, new workstart pilots, more jobmatch pilots and the national extension of other schemes. The cost of the one-year holiday in national insurance contributions is £45 million. That is relatively small compared with the other measures. It is not the case that we have held back the more expensive measures; they were delayed because primary legislation was needed.

Mr. John Townend: Will my right hon. Friend deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and me about the problem of increasing the licence fees on amusements and the removal of the vehicle licence concession for farmers?

Sir George Young: On the first point, my hon. Friend the Paymaster General has agreed to meet, in the near future, trade associations that are worried about those proposals. The committal motion provides an opportunity to debate in more detail on the Floor of the House the vehicle excise duty measure.

The hon. Member for Darlington wrongly implied that the better-off were making a lower contribution to the income tax burden. He is wrong. The top 10 per cent. are now paying 44 per cent. of the overall tax take compared to some 35 per cent. in 1979.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) spoke about absolute poverty. He was right so to do. If he looks at the fortunes of those in the bottom decile in terms of car ownership, access to a telephone, access to decently heated houses and ownership of video recorders, he will see that they enjoy a higher standard of living now than

[Sir George Young]

in 1979. That is the point that really matters. I should like to write to my hon. Friend about black tobacco when I have consulted my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Much of the debate has focused on tax. Opposition Members have quoted some rather selective figures. Real personal disposable income is expected to rise by 1.5 per cent. next year; that should mean that, on average, households will be about £5 a week better off after taking account of both tax and inflation. Real household disposable income per head has risen by almost half since 1979. The real take-home pay of a one-earner couple on average earnings with two children has risen by more than £80 a week since 1978-79.

One point has not come out so far in the debate. The difference between us and the Labour party is that our instinct is to cut taxes and we will make cuts when they can be afforded. We know, and everyone outside knows, that the Opposition are, by nature, high spenders and high taxers. They are also high borrowers. They borrowed on average almost 7 per cent. of national income a year when they were in office. Since 1979, borrowing has averaged 2 per cent. Borrowing undermines confidence. It is simply a means of deferring taxation.

The Government believe in a more principled approach. We take tough decisions to increase taxes when it is necessary to sustain growth and help reduce unemployment. The Labour party preferred to increase borrowing, which disguised rather than dealt with the problem and stored up difficulties for the future. Of course, the Labour party voted against almost every Conservative tax cut in the 1980s. It presided over a top rate of tax of 98 per cent. It has no credibility on the tax issue. It is in no position to challenge the Government.

I wish to say a few more words about venture capital trusts. Some firms with high growth potential are sometimes unable to access normal sources of finance such as the stock market or the clearing banks. They have special characteristics which the financial system is unable or unwilling to accommodate; hence, there is a funding gap which the industrial finance initiative has identified. It has also been recognised by most serious commentators on the United Kingdom scene.

Our approach, through venture capital trusts—encouraging investment in risk capital—is a better approach than the idea of regional development agencies using public funds and run by civil servants, which was the Labour party's response. The proposals for venture capital trusts in the Bill are the result of painstaking consultations that have taken place during the past year. It is fair to say that the balanced package that we proposed has been widely welcomed by the venture capital industry.

The measures will undoubtedly encourage the setting up of new businesses and new investment in expanding smaller firms. They will bring investment in private companies within the grasp of ordinary investors. There is a high risk in that area, however. It is a higher risk than investment in brand-name, quoted companies. Potential investors in venture capital trusts will need to be aware of those considerations. The proposed tax reliefs are designed to reflect the risks, not to afford a scam for higher rate taxpayers. I have tried to describe the scheme and why the Government propose it. It is a serious response to a serious problem and the Labour party is misguided in its attempt to oppose it.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) gave the game away on the "Today" programme last Thursday. Speaking with candour, if not with tact, he said of the Labour party:

"Nobody really knows what our policies are."

That concern was shared by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). Writing in *The Observer* on Sunday, he said:

"The Labour leadership has to decide if it is going to welcome serious argument and shepherd it towards a constructive conclusion, or simply stall—promising as little as possible for as long as possible."

It is clear from today's debate which option the Labour party has chosen. Today is the eighth day in two months when we have debated the economy and on each occasion we Conservatives have asked the same questions: would a Labour Government spend more or less than a Conservative Government; would a Labour Government tax more or less than a Conservative Government; and, would a Labour Government borrow more or less than a Conservative Government? Would their inflation target be higher or lower than ours? We are no wiser than we were at the beginning of the debate, two months ago.

I read in *The Guardian* last Thursday that the Leader of the Opposition told the shadow Cabinet last week:

"All public spending and tax questions must be referred to the shadow Chancellor's office."

I must tell members of the Opposition Front-Bench team who are thinking of submitting their questions for an answer that the system simply does not work. One does not get any answers. We are standing, respectfully, at the head of the queue with our questions. The questions that we ask are not difficult. They do not require a detailed look at the books before they can be answered. They are questions of broad principle that any aspiring Government ought to be able to answer. As the leader of the Labour party said when he emerged from his fraternal meeting with Members of the European Parliament last week:

"It is important to be frank with people."

Indeed; and in no area is it more important than in economic policy.

We would understand it if the Opposition said, "We can't give you the details, but here is the strategy. This is what we believe in. We'll fill in the policies later." We would accept that, but they have done exactly the opposite. They have given us a lot of little details—for example, they would reduce the maximum pay-out of the national lottery and introduce a levy on cinema tickets—but they have no strategy. There is a total vacuum, within which the policies float around. They are all dressed up and have nowhere to go.

It is no good referring to the shadow Budget, because it was not a Budget at all. It did not say how much should be spent or how much should be raised in taxation. It was a random collection of uncosted ideas, which fell foul of the Trades Descriptions Act 1968 by being called a Budget. As a result, there is confusion and suspicion about Labour's plans.

Mr. Bevins wrote:

"The Observer has now been told by a senior party source that at the very least Labour would promise to keep taxes lower than Mr. Clarke's Red Book projections."

Is that true? Opposition Members would like to know, as would we. If it were true, it would represent, in Mr. Bevins's words,

"a clear break from Labour tradition, which has always defended the need for strong tax revenues to finance the welfare state."

If the Labour party wants to underbid us on taxes, it must underbid us on spending. That would be not so much a clear break from Labour's tradition as its total burial.

Labour's economic policy is one of grudge and fudge. It is no substitute for well-thought-out, relevant, effective policies that bring hope and help to the unemployed, foster an enterprise culture, attack the burdens on small businesses, bring public finances back to balance and build on and sustain recovery. Such policies are included in the Bill, which I urge the House to support.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 277.

Division No. 38] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*

Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis

Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Cummings and Mrs. Barbara Roche.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Ordered,

That—

(1) the following provisions be committed to a Committee of the whole House—

(a) Clauses 2, 5, 8, 15, 52, 64 and 91 and Schedules 1, 4, 11 and 14, and

(b) any new Clause first appearing on the Order Paper not later than 19th January and designed to continue the statutory effect of any of the Ways and Means Resolutions of the House of 13th December;

(2) the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

(3) when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Committee tomorrow.

Chechnya

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise tonight the subject of the United Kingdom's policy towards the crisis in Chechnya. I am also grateful to the Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), for agreeing to reply to the debate.

The war in Chechnya presents the international community with a number of serious problems. The ferocity of the Russian assault on the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, involving bombardment by air and by heavy artillery on the ground, is of a scale unparalleled, even in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. We certainly cannot ignore it, nor can we ignore the potential for the conflict to spread across the Caucasus and beyond or the possible repercussions of the war in Moscow itself.

The war might be seen as yet another crisis in a far-off country of which the west knows nothing, but it is happening in a region that is every bit as complex, volatile and dangerous as the Balkans.

I think that I am possibly the only Member of Parliament to have visited Chechnya, which I did one long winter weekend a year ago. On that occasion, I met General Dudayev, the Chechen leader, and discussed his rather odd plans and ambitions with him. Although he clearly sees himself as a reincarnation of Shamyl, the tribal chief who harried Russian troops in Dagestan in the last century, he struck me as a dangerous, irresponsible fanatic who has the potential to destabilise the entire Caucasus and clearly intends to interfere in the domestic affairs of some of his neighbouring states.

He was clearly sponsoring and profiting from the growing worldwide activities of the Chechen mafia, and he was determined to forge alliances with Islamic fundamentalist regimes in other parts of the world. The week before my visit, he had been to see Saddam Hussein and, a few months earlier, he had met Colonel Gaddafi. He was also clearly disliked by a large percentage of the Chechen population, particularly by the ethnic Russian community, who were regularly harassed and attacked by his supporters.

However, none of that explains, excuses or mitigates the Russian Government's attempt to solve the problem by force. Russia's response has been unconstitutional and illegal. It has resulted in a barbaric and indiscriminate assault upon the civilian population of Chechnya. It has forced the Russian army—a conscript army of wretched, virtually unpaid recruits—to accept outrageously high casualties.

A friend in the Duma told me that the unofficial figure is 4,000 Russian military casualties. The Russian Government have succeeded in uniting the clans of Chechnya, and possibly of the whole north Caucasus, behind General Dudayev. It has been a repellent display of military blundering, political incompetence and old-style panzer communism.

The response of the international community has been curiously restrained and cautious. Perhaps the reason for that is a lack of understanding or knowledge of the

[Mr. Harold Elletson]

area. Perhaps it is because Governments see in this challenge to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation the ghosts of 1991, when the west consented to the break-up of another sovereign, internationally recognised federal republic, Yugoslavia, despite the advice of our own envoy, Lord Carrington.

As I am sure the Minister will readily agree, there is a certain logical inconsistency in our willingness to accept the destruction of the Yugoslav federation and its replacement with artificial states whose borders were imposed by Tito, but to ignore the challenge to the territorial integrity of another federation, Russia, by an autonomous republic whose borders were imposed by Stalin.

I do not wish to dwell on the mistakes and tragedies of the past, but if we are to preserve anything from the ruins of the idea of a new world order, we should at least try to be consistent. I hope that our response to the Chechen crisis—which, although muted so far, is none the less the right one—will be maintained undiluted and clearly stated, along with our absolute condemnation of the methods that Russia has used.

I hope that the silence of the west when Russian tanks first moved into Chechnya did not result from a fear of upsetting President Yeltsin and provoking Russia into turning its back on the west. If that was the reason, it was based on a misunderstanding of the political situation in Russia and the probable effect of the Chechen crisis on it. We should understand that the most likely consequence of the war in Chechnya for the Russian political system could be a strengthening rather than a weakening of democratic institutions.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I receive many letters from my constituents about this matter, which is unusual, as it is a foreign affairs issue. They are deeply concerned by the scenes that they see on television, and by the bombing that is going on in Grozny in particular. Although they wish President Yeltsin well in the reforms that he is instituting in Russia, they wish to see a solution in Chechnya which does not involve the bombing of innocent women and children.

Mr. Elletson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I understand his constituents' concern. They are seeing some horrific atrocities, as are the Russian public for the first time, on their television screens. This war takes place against a background of struggle within the Russian Government—particularly in the President's own circle—between the various factions which are competing for succession.

Vested interests, such as the military-industrial complex and the so-called power Ministries of defence and security, have been jockeying for a greater hold on the levers of power. All the time, government has been increasingly concentrated in the hands of the President and his Security Council, while the state Duma—the Parliament—has little or no control. One of the consequences of the present crisis will be to create the political impulse for a more effective parliamentary system where the Executive is properly accountable.

We have misunderstood the Duma for too long, and seen it purely as a threat to President Yeltsin and his circle of reformers. Now it is the centre of activity for those who protest against the war in Chechnya. Several Duma members—most notably Sergei Kovalyov, Russia's human rights commissioner—have shown great bravery by visiting Chechnya under fire in order to report on the appalling situation there. Yegor Gaidar, Duma member and former Prime Minister, has led the campaign against the war.

We need to support such people—to encourage them, and not to fear the consequences of being forthright in our criticism of President Yeltsin, however good a friend or democrat he may have been in the past. We will do Russia no favours if we assume that the war in Chechnya can be ignored and that Russia's relations with the west can remain unaffected by it.

Unfortunately, the first and most obvious consequence for our relations with Russia will inevitably be to call into question western aid and investment. That will happen, because the economic costs of the war will be enormous and probably sufficient to derail the Russian Government's budget this year.

Given the scale of western financial support, there are bound to be calls for a reappraisal unless the fighting ends soon. That will be very sad, and it is an issue that needs to be handled carefully, but unless the Russians adopt a more reasonable course of action, and unless Prime Minister Chernomyrdin commits his Government clearly and unambiguously to a ceasefire and peace negotiations, it will be unavoidable.

Sadder still will be the effect on Russia's position in the international community. The Chechen crisis cannot but have a effect on the negotiations about Russia's new relationship with the European Union, NATO, the Council of Europe, the International Monetary Fund and other international organisations.

All the good work that has been done over the past five years to draw Russia into the heart of Europe and to make her once again part of the international community of nations is now in jeopardy. If the position does not change soon and there is no serious attempt to abandon force in favour of negotiation, the west's response to Russia will have to be as firm as it was to China over Tiananmen square. That will be a sad day for all of us who believed in the new Russia and Boris Yeltsin.

What concerns me most about the crisis is the effect on the wider Transcaucasus. I do not know whether one of the motives for the Russian Government's actions was their concern to secure oil supply routes and facilities in Chechnya. The Russians take extremely seriously the potential for development of energy resources in and around the Caspian sea.

I visited the area on a number of occasions with BP Exploration, and I must declare an interest as an adviser to that company. The region's energy resources have stirred up an intense amount of feeling and disagreement in Russia, the Transcaucasus and central Asia. They have also been the cause of a serious disagreement between Britain and Russia over the status of the Caspian sea.

In Moscow, opinions on the issue are divided. There are those who see western involvement in the development of the energy resources of former Soviet republics as an unacceptable attempt by the west to steal oil and gas which is basically Russia's. Others feel that Russian industry will profit by the development of such a large market on its doorstep.

In any event, both groups understand the importance of secure transportation routes of energy from the region. Some people suggest that that is the real reason for the conflict in Chechnya, and that it is yet another war about oil. I do not believe that oil is anything other than an incidental and peripheral consideration for the Russian Government in the present fighting, but I am sure that it has been a motive for Russian actions in the region in the recent past. We must help to ensure that it does not become the cause of a much greater escalation of the conflict beyond Chechnya's borders. We must make absolutely clear our commitment to the independence and sovereignty of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Kazakhstan. We must be vigilant in guarding against Russian interference, particularly in countries where there is a significant commercial interest. We should protest strongly at Russia's recent decision to seal the Azeri border, which is severely damaging Azerbaijan's economy.

We must point out that, although western companies are keen to co-operate with Russian business in the area, the confidence of international investors in possible pipeline routes through Grozny to the Russian Black sea has been severely damaged, together with investor confidence in Russia itself.

At the same time, we must commend countries bordering Chechnya for their responsible action in refraining from interfering in the conflict. We should recognise that now is the time to ensure a proper British presence in the region. There is already an embassy in Baku, but surely we should have full diplomatic representation also in Georgia and Armenia. A decision to open embassies there would further demonstrate at this important time our commitment to the independence of those states.

We ought to consider the effect of the Chechnya crisis on the region's other major security problem—the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. It is difficult to see how Russia could conceivably provide now the substantial troop contribution to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe peacekeeping operations in Nagorny Karabakh that was envisaged at the Budapest summit. However, it is vital not to lose the opportunity to establish a credible international peacekeeping operation in the region.

I hope that the Minister will ensure that Russia's difficulties do not jeopardise OSCE operations in Karabakh. Although I realise the extent of our other commitments, I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to consider with some of our allies the provision of logistic and other military support if that would help to ensure that the momentum of the peace process in Karabakh is not lost.

The war in Chechnya has exposed an extreme form of Russian nationalism. It has diminished Russia in the eyes of the world, shown the Russian army to be a paper tiger, and undermined Moscow's claim to be a credible force for stability in a volatile region—creating a dangerous vacuum that other powers may soon seek to fill.

These are troubled times. We must urge Russia back on to the proper path. We must seek calm and restraint from all those with an interest in the region. In that, Britain has an important role to play. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will ensure that we do our part to bring peace and prosperity to the Caucasus.

10.32 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) for this timely opportunity to debate a topic of major concern to the international community. My hon. Friend's special knowledge of Russia and of the former Soviet Union makes him unusually well qualified to introduce this Adjournment debate.

The suffering in Chechnya is the latest tragedy in a list of events since the collapse of the former Soviet Union that includes other conflicts in the Caucasian region. The Chechens are proud of their warrior tradition. During the 19th century, there was frequent fighting between Russia and the tribesmen of the northern Caucasus. In 1859, Chechnya became part of the Russian empire, although that did not end the conflict.

Subsequently, Chechnya, together with the rest of the Russian empire, was incorporated into the Soviet Union. During the second world war, Stalin ordered the forced deportation of the Chechen people, and thousands died. The consequences of that act of barbarism are with us today.

Alone among the leaders of the Russian Federation, General Dudayev was unwilling to negotiate seriously with Moscow on the republic's status within the federation. In November 1991, the general unilaterally declared independence, which received no international recognition. I will say a few words about General Dudayev's regime, to which my hon. Friend specifically referred.

Clearly, General Dudayev is no democrat. He stamped out opposition and stifled freedom of speech. Under that regime, the economy collapsed and crime escalated. Between 100,000 and 150,000 non-Chechens fled the republic, and even some of his closest supporters turned against him. The threat to regional stability—already fragile—grew, and all attempts to negotiate foundered on the general's insistence on sovereignty. Fighting broke out between pro-Moscow opposition forces and those of Dudayev.

None of that justifies, as my hon. Friend has said, the suffering that is occurring, but it helps to explain why President Yeltsin decided to use force. He saw it as the only way in which to preserve the integrity of the federation. Now we watch with mounting distress as the modern army uses the immense firepower at its disposal against those who are its fellow citizens. Casualties, Chechen and Russian, run into thousands, and many are civilians. According to the UNHCR, an estimated 150,000 people have fled to neighbouring areas and, in addition, there are an estimated 260,000 displaced people in Chechnya itself.

In formulating our approach to this tragedy, we have to be clear about the status of Chechnya. Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation. That is the view of the British Government. That is the view of the international community. Against that background, we have identified three priorities.

First, the fighting must end as quickly as possible and with the minimum of civilian casualties. Secondly, immediate humanitarian relief must reach those in need. It is important that international agencies, especially the International Committee of the Red Cross, are involved

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

in that. Thirdly, no agreement will last unless it finds an effective way of enabling the Chechen people to express their identity within the framework of the constitution of the Russian Federation.

We have used every opportunity, here and in Moscow, to make our views known. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out our views in a letter to Foreign Minister Kozyrev. He reinforced that on 10 January when Ambassador Adamishin was summoned to the Foreign Office.

In addition, we believe that the OSCE may have a special role to play in bringing the crisis to an end. We have urged that on the Russians bilaterally, and together with our European Union partners, in joint approaches to the Russian foreign ministry. The Russian reaction to a possible role for the OSCE has been positive, and we welcome that. For the Russians, the status of Chechnya is a matter of great importance. They emphasise that Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation and, as I have said, the international community accepts that fact.

But equally, in view of the commitments that Russia has made in the OSCE, what is happening in Chechnya is a matter of legitimate international concern. As the chairman of the Russian Parliament's foreign affairs committee said on 10 January:

"The OSCE is insisting on sending in observers and I must say that under the agreement signed by us, it is fully entitled to do that."

The OSCE's involvement should be seen as co-operation. We look to Russia to live up to her OSCE commitments. It is in the interests of all that she should do so.

Some have seen the Russian action in Chechnya as a precursor of wider military action in the region and the resurgence of Russian imperialism. The British Government do not believe that that is the case. The Russian goals are to restore its authority in part of its own territory, and so far the fighting has remained in the confines of Chechnya. Indeed, there is no intrinsic reason why it should spread. We welcome the fact that, in neighbouring countries such as Azerbaijan and Georgia, to which my hon. Friend referred, where there has been internal strife, ceasefires are now in place, and the international community is actively engaged in helping to work out peaceful settlements.

The most pressing need, therefore, is for an end to the fighting, as my hon. Friend has said. The ceasefire announced last week failed to hold. To achieve one will doubtless be hard. Both sides are now heavily committed militarily. General Dudayev has so far shown no signs of compromising on his basic demand for sovereignty. In any case, his is not the only Chechen voice. We must continue in our attempts to persuade both sides that a long-term solution must come from negotiations that take their respective views into account.

There are signs that the Russians are developing their thinking on that. First Deputy Prime Minister Soskovets said on 14 January that, after the restoration of constitutional order in Chechnya, the new republican authorities will be exempted from fiscal obligations to the centre, and they will be granted autonomy in all fields except foreign affairs and defence.

The Russian Prime Minister, Chernomyrdin, has also begun a wide-ranging series of contacts with the leading members of the Chechen diaspora. Other senior figures are meeting clan leaders in Chechnya itself. The latest development, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's call for immediate negotiations with a simultaneous ceasefire, is a further positive step. He envisages elections, followed by a discussion of Chechnya's status within the Federation. He has proposed that, before elections, there should be wide-ranging consultations on the formation of a transitional Government who would represent the interests of all Chechens. That appears to be a constructive approach, and we understand that Chechen negotiators have travelled to Moscow today. If that is true, it is welcome.

While fighting continues, we must try to ease suffering. Thousands need assistance. The international agencies are mobilising their resources. We welcome the fact that the Russians are allowing those agencies to act and have sought the help of the ICRC, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organisation for Migration.

We are actively involved in offering humanitarian assistance, and the European Union has already provided the ICRC with around £250,000 to pay for medicines and shelter. Further requests will doubtless come, and we stand ready to help if and when they do.

I refer now to our relations with Russia, an issue that was specifically referred to by my hon. Friend. Now is not the time for threats and sanctions. We have devoted much energy and resources over the past few years to encouraging the spread of democracy in Russia.

I have been struck by the freedom that the Russian people have exercised in criticising the decisions of their leaders. The media—written and broadcast—have brought home the true horror of this intervention, and the people have made their feelings quite plain. This is no Afghanistan, where events were shrouded in secrecy, and only a restricted and carefully controlled selection of information reached the public domain. Chechnya demonstrates that, in that respect at least, democracy is taking root in Russia.

The people regard their leaders as accountable. That is as it should be. We would regard any attempt to stifle that debate with the utmost concern. Vigorous democratic debate in Russia of the type that we are now seeing is helpful for us all.

The longer-term implications of the Chechnya crisis remain unclear. Despite much speculation, there does not so far appear to be an imminent threat to Russia's nascent democracy, but we must be alert. Damage has doubtless been done, and there is much uncertainty about the future.

Some liberal politicians in Moscow fear a return of authoritarian rule and Russia's international isolation. So far, events have not borne out those fears. Russia must live up to what is expected of a modern democratic state, and we look to her to do that. Our policies will take account of what happens within Russia, but now is not the time to exclude Russia from international organisations, or otherwise to heap penalties upon her.

To summarise, I record my gratitude to my hon. Friend; this is an important issue, as is marked by the fact that many hon. Members have attended the debate,

which itself is unusual in such a debate. We should, in substance, avoid hasty decisions. The priorities are and should remain to put an end to the fighting, to allow humanitarian relief, and to work for a political agreement which allows the Chechen people to express their identify within the Russian Federation. We must encourage the Russians to allow the international community and, in particular, the OSCE to co-operate in the implementation of those objectives.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government (Derbyshire)

1. **Mrs. Angela Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the local government review in Derbyshire.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): The commission published its final report on Derbyshire last Wednesday. There is a six-week period for representations to the Department of the Environment.

Mrs. Knight: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widely held view of Derbyshire people that their arguments in favour of unitary authorities were ignored by the commission from the start? While Derby city rightly gets its independence under the proposals, does he agree that the benefits of unitary authorities should be spread more widely across Derbyshire, rather than leaving so many people to struggle on under the currently imperfect two-tier system?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend will know that during this period I have to listen very carefully to views from all sides, and I have noted very clearly what she and many of her colleagues think. At the end of the six-week period I shall have to make up my mind as to what to present to Parliament.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that in the course of the Local Government Commission's discussions—which extended over many months, during which the Minister sent the commission back to test the water again—every single piece of evidence from all the polling surveys made it clear that the Derbyshire people wanted to retain the status quo? It has been an extremely costly exercise for the taxpayers of Derbyshire and for Britain as a whole. It is time that the Minister got off his political high horse and stopped trying to disassemble Derbyshire just because he does not like its political complexion. Why does the Minister not accept the survey results?

Mr. Gummer: There is clearly a difference of view in Derbyshire which has already been represented in the House today. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, once the discussion period has ended, we should lay the order with due speed. I hope that he will ask his hon. Friends not to hold up all the orders until the end of the process because that would cause considerable difficulty for the people who work in Derbyshire and the districts. I hope that the Labour party will support a speedy process.

Local Government (Hampshire)

2. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his final response to the proposals of the Local Government Commission in relation to Hampshire.

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): We are still considering the commission's recommendations for Hampshire in the light of meetings with nine of the councils concerned and the views contained in some 2,000 letters.

Mr. Viggers: While not many people threw their hats in the air at the commission's interim conclusions—which recommend that county borough status should be restored to Southampton and Portsmouth—very few people outside the New Forest can understand the late idea that the New Forest should have unitary status. I accept that my hon. Friend is not in a position to give me an answer this afternoon, but will he bear in mind the strong representations outside the New Forest that giving the New Forest unitary status will considerably damage the concept of Hampshire as a county?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend will understand that in reaching our conclusions on this and all other counties we have to judge the intrinsic merits of the case for unitary status in particular areas, together with the consequential effects on the remaining county area if a hybrid solution is envisaged.

Mr. Denham: The Minister will be aware of the strong support in Southampton for a unitary council for that area. Will he bring forward a clear timetable for local government reorganisation in Hampshire? Matters are drifting on month by month and people are unclear about whether they will face elections for new authorities this May or next year. It is also deeply unsettling for the staff who are delivering services. Will the Minister give a commitment to announcing a clear timetable for decision making and for implementing the results?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we must consider carefully all the representations that we have received, and there is a heavy volume of representations from Hampshire. As soon as we have done so, we shall announce our intentions. When we have done that, I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman, for the reasons that he has just stated, will want us to invite Parliament to take a decision so that the staff, about whose future he is rightly concerned, will know exactly where they stand and will not be kicking their heels for several months or perhaps a year while the process is completed.

Mr. Colvin: Contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) had to say, does my hon. Friend appreciate that there is another view in Hampshire? Two thirds of my constituency is within the New Forest, so I can confirm that there is strong support for the recommendation that there should be unitary status for that district. With regard to resources, the New Forest is the fifth biggest district council in the country, out of 333 district councils, in terms of its tax base, and even if it were given unitary status Hampshire county council would still remain the fourth biggest. Will my hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to rumour, our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State still has an open mind on the

recommendations for Hampshire? Will the Minister also talk to the Secretary of State for Education about the recommendations—*[Interruption.]*—as she has undertaken to look carefully at the ability of the New Forest to provide an education service—*[Interruption.]*—as good as, or better than, that which Hampshire county council now provides?

Madam Speaker: Order. It is an abuse of Question Time when hon. Members go on for so long. I wish that they would spend part of their lunch time working out the questions that they want to ask the Minister. That would make very good use of the lunch period.

Mr. Curry: As soon as we have considered the representations, we shall announce our decision. The case for the New Forest, as well as the implications for the rest of the county, must of course be borne in mind. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will be able to consider the recommendations as all these matters are for the collective decision of the Government.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Is the Minister aware that he could dispel the cynicism which surrounds the review process for Hampshire and the rest of the country if he would make it clear now that he will bring before the House the final recommendations of the commission in every case in which change is proposed? If he will provide that guarantee and also make it clear that staff will have the same terms and conditions, whether on redundancy or transfer, that they were given with the abolition of the metropolitan counties, the doubts which now divide his hon. Friends will be set at naught, particularly if we know that the House of Commons and the House of Lords will have a proper say in the process.

Mr. Curry: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question seems entirely without point. Of course we shall bring the matter before the House: we are obliged to do so. I look forward to the debate. I enjoyed the debate on Cleveland enormously and I hope to enjoy the same spectacle reproduced on the Opposition side in debate after debate on these matters. The one thing that would militate actively against the interests of the staff would be not knowing where they stand and following the Labour party policy of deciding nothing until all the recommendations were before the House. If that were the case, no one would know where they were and the recipe for uncertainty would be enormous.

Environmental Pollution

3. **Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about assistance provided by the Government to eastern European countries to deal with environmental pollution.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins): Like many other people, the Government have been appalled to learn of the extent of pollution and environmental destruction that has been exposed since the collapse of communism and socialism in the former eastern bloc. We are providing substantial support to the newly emerging democracies to improve the situation through our environmental know-how fund.

Mr. Elletson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply and I congratulate him on the success of the environmental know-how fund, which has sponsored more than 100 projects throughout eastern Europe. As eastern Europe continues to endure a horrific legacy of years of socialist central planning, is my hon. Friend prepared to consider how the environmental know-how fund might be expanded, perhaps in partnership with the private sector?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend, with his knowledge of the eastern bloc countries, speaks with greater authority on the matter than almost anyone in the House and I pay great heed to anything he has to say. I assure him that we shall continue to consider ways and means whereby we can help those emerging democracies, and any ideas that he has to add to what we are already doing will be gratefully accepted.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Much as I appreciate the Minister's actions in respect of other countries, will he continue to bear in mind Northern Ireland's problems with environmental pollution, of which he is much aware?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman raises a point which could take us down a long and difficult path. He will understand that not all such problems can be solved quickly. I am sure that my successors in Northern Ireland, doing the job that I once did, are as aware as the hon. Gentleman of the need to continue the good work of environmental improvement there.

Council Housing Waiting Lists

4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are on waiting lists for council housing; and what action he will take to provide housing for them.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): On 1 April 1994, there were some 1.1 million applicants—the lowest figure recorded since information was first collected in 1986.

Mr. Cohen: Are not the Government proposing to make it harder for people to join housing waiting lists and to obtain the homes that they need? The demand will still be there, but people will be told that they cannot get on a waiting list and have no chance of rehousing while the Government claim, as the Minister just did, that they are getting waiting lists down. Is not the real problem shortage of supply? Ministers like to make comparisons with the last Labour Government. In the final year of the Labour Government, there were 107,000 starts on homes to rent, but next year the figure will be down to 20,000. Does the Minister accept that if starts returned to the level under the last Labour Government more people would be decently housed?

Mr. Jones: We do not share the hon. Gentleman's obsession with that form of tenure. It is right and proper that there should be a choice of tenure which reflects the aspirations of the public. The waiting list in the London borough of Waltham Forest has fallen by 20 per cent. in the last two years.

Sir Anthony Durant: Can my hon. Friend say how many empty council houses there are in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Jones: There is a substantial number of empty council houses, and we have been working with local

authorities to make sure that they are brought into use. Under-occupied and vacant council housing means that people do not get homes that they might otherwise obtain.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Does the Minister accept that there are particular problems with homelessness in rural areas, especially where house prices are high due to an influx of people who work elsewhere or who wish to own second homes? Such areas are particularly worried about cuts in the housing association programme, which mean that some associations will be unable to build any new homes in the coming years. At the same time, many councils are unable to build and have sold off a large proportion of their already low housing stock.

Mr. Jones: The Housing Corporation programme provides for a top slice for rural housing, which we have maintained as an important ingredient. The challenge for rural local authorities is the same as that facing authorities in general—to use their stock to best advantage, which means that they, too, must have proper strategies to deal with under-occupation and to command what available lettings there are in the private rented sector.

Superstore Developments

5. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on superstore developments on main arterial roads in urban areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: New retail developments should ideally be sited in or within easy walking distance of existing urban centres. Main arterial roads rarely provide suitable all-round access.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for that long reply. There is a dichotomy, in that many constituencies have major arterial roads—in my constituency it is the north circular—running through them. When a large superstore is developed on such a road, that adversely affects local shopping areas. Does my right hon. Friend agree that careful thought must be given to such developments as their adverse effect on high streets is the same as that caused by out-of-town developments?

Mr. Gummer: My final sentence described the hiatus that occurs on local roads when an arterial route is built. My hon. Friend is right: the way in which arterial roads draw populations from outside and often attract business away from local shopping centres is a real issue. We are determined to improve and enhance existing shopping centres and to ensure that the public have better access to them so that those centres can grow and bring new vitality to our towns and small areas.

Mr. Heppell: Will the Minister also take into account the dangers of the increased traffic associated with arterial roads? In my constituency there are two planned superstore developments on Valley road, both near accident black spots. Will he give a guarantee that if the submissions are referred to him he will take such factors into consideration?

Mr. Gummer: I am, of course, very concerned with road safety. One of my beliefs is that if we can give new life to city centres and the centres of small towns, and if we can make proper provision for the motor car so that people can use their cars to shop, park them safely and walk from the parking place to the shops—that would probably involve using closed circuit television—we could do a great deal to make them feel that such centres are pleasant, welcoming places. They ought also to be places where we can reduce the number of accidents by designing urban communities properly.

Mr. Hawksley: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that his current policy on superstores will not adversely affect the application for the Merry Hill development in the west midlands, which would result in a welcome influx of some £8 million of private money? I hope that the slight change which seems to have occurred in Government policy will not result in any delay in that application being dealt with.

Mr. Gummer: It would be wrong for me to judge an application on the Floor of the House; I shall look at each one on its merits. There is nothing in our proposition to suggest that out-of-town development is always wrong. We are saying that the balance should be changed and that greater weight should be given to the needs of city centres and the centres of our smaller towns. It is that balance that we have changed. The change has been extremely successful, people in the country at large believe it to be correct, and we shall continue with it.

Home Renovation Grants

6. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many home renovation grants were made last year; and what were the figures for 1984 and 1989.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Figures are not yet available for 1994. In 1993, however, 90,000 grants were made under the new provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In 1984 and 1989 local authorities awarded 229,000 and 98,000 home improvement grants respectively.

Mr. O'Brien: Do not the figures prove that the grant system for renovation, improvements and community activities is wholly inadequate and is not working? As the Government have repeatedly cut the money provided over the years, local authorities now cannot even provide mandatory grants and it is quite impossible to supply discretionary grants. When will the Minister do something for people who are living in sub-standard accommodation and squalor? When may we expect the Government to provide the resources to improve accommodation and bring it up to the standards to which people are entitled?

Mr. Jones: Concerns about the renovation grant system were expressed to me and to other Ministers during the housing investment programme round and at other times, and we have been consulting on what to do about the long-term strategy for renovation. We shall announce our conclusions in due course. It was wrong for the hon. Gentleman to say that there is necessarily a shortage of resources throughout the country as it varies from authority to authority. Some of them underspend their allocations. Wakefield benefited from a recent reallocation when we were able to give it a further £440,000 as a result of underspending by other authorities.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Although it is good for local authorities to improve their housing stock and its energy

conservation wherever possible, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a waste of money to ask every local authority to do a complete audit of how that can be done? Unless a great deal more money can be obtained from the Treasury, such audits will be wasted and will use up money which could be better spent elsewhere.

Mr. Jones: It is extremely important to get information on these matters so as to be able to judge housing investment programme bids, and others. We have been requiring local authorities to provide us with evidence of their energy efficiency strategy in order to evaluate their housing strategies. An assessment of every house would cost a great deal of money, which would be wrong, but there are now plenty of systems for assessing the energy efficiency of housing without going into that sort of detail.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the Minister give a fuller reply to the main question? The figure of 90,000 includes not just renovation grants but disabled facility grants and minor works grants, most of them for small sums. If he compares like with like, he will find that the number of renovation grants has fallen dramatically since the mid and late 1980s.When will the Government recognise that thousands of people living in sub-standard housing have been waiting for years for grants which are supposed to be mandatory because the Government have not provided the money to enable local authorities to pay those grants?

Mr. Jones: As I said earlier, that is not true of all local authorities. Issues have been raised by different councils throughout the country about quantity of resources and the nature of the regime. Some councils feel that the present mandatory system stops them focusing their regeneration strategies properly on areas which really need them. We shall have to weigh all the arguments before reaching a conclusion about the future of the system.

Millennium Fund

7. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what projects under the control of his Department he will be applying for funds from the millennium fund.

Mr. Gummer: None.

Mr. Dalyell: Is the Secretary of State aware that when my former steelworker friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) and I made a four-hour visit to the greatest structure of the 19th century—the Forth rail bridge—we were appalled at the flaking paint, the debris of dead birds and, frankly, seagull shit on the bare steel structure? As Railtrack has other priorities, should this not be a matter for the millennium fund as the bridge is a national monument associated not only with Scotland but with Britain and Europe?

Mr. Gummer: I shall take a considerable interest in inspecting personally the structure to which the hon. Gentleman refers and I will do my best to assess what he has said.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that what he has done today in asking a question as a Scottish Member is something that he would be able to do in future if Labour's devolution plans were to go through but which no English Member would be able to do as English Members would not be able to ask questions about Scotland.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend advise the House whether it would be in order to apply to the millennium fund to finance a preservation order on the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)?

Mr. Gummer: The example that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) put forward is one of considerable importance. I also believe, however, that we should all recognise that we have a history which is worth preserving and that part of that history is a constitution which should not be monkeyed about with.

Council Tax

8. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average council tax for a band D house in Westminster and for a band D house in St. Helens.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: For St. Helens it is £652 and for Westminster £245. If St. Helens were to spend at the same rate as Westminster relative to standard spending assessment, the band D council tax in St. Helens would be £224—even lower than in Westminster.

Mr. Evans: Will the Minister acknowledge that St. Helens and Westminster city councils are roughly the same size and cover roughly the same population? Will he acknowledge also that the reason for the appalling figures that he has announced is that for every £1 that Westminster city councils spends it receives 97p in Government rate support grant while St. Helens city council receives only 77p? Would the hon. Gentleman be surprised to hear from me that the people of St. Helens increasingly regard an RSG system which creates enormous disparities between broadly similar authorities as utterly corrupt?

Mr. Jones: To describe St. Helens and Westminster as broadly similar authorities is ridiculous, just as it would be ridiculous to compare St. Helens with, for example, the London borough of Hackney, which also receives a high standard spending assessment. As the hon. Gentleman knows, SSA reflects a range of factors which are different in different authorities. For example, millions of visitors and commuters come into Westminster, which is not the case in St. Helens. An apt comparison is what would happen if St. Helens spent as far below its SSA as Westminster did, and I commend that to the hon. Gentleman's local authority.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if other inner-London boroughs that get similar resources from the Government to those of Westminster were as efficient as Westminster, there would be no reason why they should not have a similarly low council tax? Is not Westminster's low council tax a tribute to the fact that it has been at the forefront of contracting out and, wherever it can, it seeks out and roots out waste?

Mr. Jones: What my hon. Friend says is absolutely correct. If other local authorities in inner London were as persistent in examining the cost-effectiveness of their administration, they would end up with the dividends for their council tax payers.

Mr. Dobson: Do not the figures quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans)

show that the Government are pouring taxpayers' money into Westminster to keep down the council tax there, at the expense of money being available for other places, such as St. Helens? Why should other parts of Britain, including the parts represented by Conservative Members, have to suffer because the Government have to give extra money to Westminster to make up for the £3 million that they squandered on the cemeteries, the £21 million on the homes for votes scandal and the £13 million that Westminster Tories forgot to collect in service and repair charges from the people who bought their council houses?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is a Member for the London borough of Camden, the SSA for which is almost exactly the same per capita as for the London borough of Westminster. I assume, therefore, that, as the figures came out of the same system, he wants the grant to the London borough of Camden to be cut dramatically. I think that he will have awful difficulty with the councillors on his selection board when he goes up for reselection.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that Westminster provides services that are much appreciated by the citizens of Westminster, but in Ealing, a comparable area, the Labour council is drastically reducing services as well as putting up the council tax by 10 per cent? Is that not socialism as we see it in this country?

Mr. Jones: If one needs to judge socialism, the best place in which to look is where it is practised—Labour-controlled authorities. What my hon. Friend says about the London borough of Ealing will, I am sure, get home as a very important message to the electors of Ealing, North for the next general election.

Single Regeneration Budget

10. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for a second round of bidding for the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: A second bidding round of the single regeneration budget will be launched later this year. Some £40 million will be available in 1996-97 for early funding of approved bids and £200 million the following year.

Mr. Dowd: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that the London borough of Lewisham, which has an exemplary record in public-private finance partnerships, including city challenge and estate action, is still unaware of the status of the three unsuccessful first-round bids in relation to the second round of bidding, which is due to commence shortly? Does he agree that his Department has a responsibility to provide all local authorities with unambiguous and clear guidelines at the earliest opportunity if they are to persist with their cut-price, gameshow approach to urban regeneration?

Mr. Curry: If it is a cut-price approach, I am surprised that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) said that he thought that the sums spent on it were about right; he said that Labour would spend roughly the same amount of money.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) has forgotten, perhaps, that Lewisham received £14 million from the urban programme, that Deptford city challenge is receiving £37.5 million over five years and that the task force is receiving £1 million of Government money and £10 million levied from other sources. There are four major estate action programmes worth £83 million of public funds, two successful SRB bids related to ethnic minorities, and the docklands light railway extension, so it ain't a bad record as far as Lewisham is concerned.

As for the Deptford creek project, the local authority will have been in discussion with the Government office about the nature of that bid. The bidding will not change so substantially for the second round that the bids that did not qualify this time will not be eligible as candidates in the second round. Clearly, one cannot prejudge the outcome.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Sadly, Macclesfield was unsuccessful in the first round under this programme—perhaps even more so than Lewisham, Macclesfield being one of the few councils still with overall Conservative control, well run, abiding by every regulation that the Government request of it. Does my hon. Friend accept that, even in an area that is considered to be prosperous, there are pockets of deprivation and poverty and that this project can uniquely assist in such areas? Will he give me an assurance that any further application from Macclesfield will receive his sympathetic consideration?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend will know that the single regeneration budget has national coverage, so all areas in the country are eligible to bid. There were successful bids from rural and urban areas. I cannot give my hon. Friend an assurance that a bid will receive sympathetic consideration any more than I can say that it will receive unsympathetic consideration. However, the regional office will be working with the partners to ensure that any problems or deficiencies in a bid are pointed out so that the authorities are capable of bidding in the second round.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister is clearly not aware of the huge costs and the great difficulties faced by those local authorities that have been unsuccessful in their first round bids. Will he ensure that, before the second round begins, a detailed regional statement is produced by the regional offices—something that he failed to have produced at the last round of the SRB—so that local authorities know precisely what the criteria will be, or is it the case that the statement cannot be published because the Government do not have a clue what their regeneration policy should be?

Mr. Curry: That is rather rich coming from the hon. Gentleman, who is allegedly the author of "City 2020", which sank without trace soon after being launched; even the assistance of the mayor of Baltimore could not rescue that document. The regional office has instructions to work with all the partners in order to point out where there were deficiencies so that they are capable of bidding for the second time around. *[Interruption.]* It is not a blind date process. It is done with a great deal of consideration.

The best bids won this time, but we do not intend that those that were unsuccessful should not be capable of putting their bid in order so that they can bid the second time around, when their bid will be judged on its merits in competition with other bids.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government are often accused of diverting money to areas that support the Government's case? Will he therefore explain to me why, under the single regeneration budget,

the two most successful areas in Derbyshire were Bolsover and Chesterfield? Are they well known for their support of Government policies?

Mr. Curry: I am tempted to say that it clearly must reflect the particular characteristics of the Members of Parliament concerned, but I do not wish to mislead the House on the matter. It happened because those bids, which were the result of public and private sector support, were among the best bids in the region. That demonstrates that this is not a political process; it is based on the merits of a bid in a competitive process which has proved to be successful.

Pollution

11. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had with the National Rivers Authority regarding pollution from abandoned mine workings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My Department maintains regular contact with the National Rivers Authority about this issue.

Mr. Mullin: As the Minister knows, there is much concern in the north-east and elsewhere on this issue. Will he assure the House that the Coal Authority will continue to fund the pumping of abandoned mine workings for as long as the NRA thinks is necessary, bearing in mind the fact that, if it all goes wrong, the cost of clearing up will be much greater than the cost of the pumping?

Mr. Atkins: It is certainly the intention that the Coal Authority will continue to fund the necessary pumping and I have no reason to suppose that that situation will change.

Sir Donald Thompson: As my hon. Friend says, disused coal mines are fairly well catered for, but mines from which other minerals came seem to have been completely forgotten, especially those whose ownership has been lost in the mists of time; a similar situation applies to quarries. Will my hon. Friend consider that?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is right to raise that matter, which will be dealt with in the Environment Bill, which is being discussed in another place. We will be interested to hear what he has to say on the matter when it arrives at this end.

Ms Ruddock: Is the Minister aware that, under the Environment Bill, polluting water from abandoned mines will continue to emanate therefrom until the turn of the century? Why is liability to prosecution not to be imposed until 1999? Could it be because the contracts of private mine owners with the power generators come up for renewal in 1998 and the Government expect more mines to be abandoned at that point? Is that not just another example of a Government trying to protect private profits over the environment?

Mr. Atkins: As usual, the hon. Lady is living in cloud cuckoo land. We are dealing with the real world, in which we must give as much warning as possible to those involved. That is why we consider 1999 an appropriate date. I have no doubt that, when the matter is discussed as we debate the Environment Bill, the hon. Lady will make similar points and I shall give a similar response.

Mr. Devlin: Should not those who close mines in future have to give the new agency ample notice of their intentions, and also state what provision they will make for the pumping that may be necessary thereafter?

Mr. Atkins: Yes, and we hope that the Bill will contain precisely that recommendation. We intend, for instance, that six months' notice will be required in 1999. My hon. Friend's points will be taken on board.

Nuclear Waste

12. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a decision about the proposal to use local authority landfill sites for the dumping of low-level nuclear waste.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Currently, hospitals, universities and laboratories dispose of low-level radioactive waste at a small number of landfill sites under strictly controlled conditions. By low-level radioactive waste, I mean rubber gloves, wrappings and clothing, for instance, that may have been contaminated in the handling of radioactive material such as that used in the treatment of cancer. The extent of use of this method has been reviewed, the results have been out to consultation and conclusions will be announced in due course.

Mr. Chisholm: Will the Minister reject the recommendation of his own Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee that local authorities should be forced to accept low-level nuclear waste, including waste from nuclear power stations, against their wishes? Does he admit that that is a cost-cutting proposal, connected at least in part with future privatisation of the nuclear industry?

Hon. Members: Nonsense.

Sir Paul Beresford: Hon. Members on both sides of the House put the point rather well; it is absolute nonsense. The committee to which the hon. Gentleman refers is an advisory committee, and is not forcing anyone to do anything.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend confirm that low-level waste usually has a half life of only a few months? That means that, after a couple of years, the level of radioactivity is asymptotic to zero and virtually non-existent.

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend has put the matter into perspective. The radioactivity level is extremely low, and if any movement took place in the wrong direction there would be an outcry from the national health authorities about disposal facilities.

Noise Working Party

13. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the working party on noise to complete its work; if it will take evidence; and in what form it will publish its conclusions.

Mr. Atkins: The working party expects to complete its review shortly, and I intend to consult extensively on its conclusions and recommendations.

Mr. Hughes: That answer is welcome. I believe, however, that the working party is composed of officials

from the Home Office and other Departments, the police and local government; out there, the public want their shout on the issue. I consider that the public take a much harder line than officials on the need to be tough on noise makers. Will the Minister guarantee that they will have their say, and that their views will prevail rather than those of enforcement agencies which often want an easy life?

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. He will know of the campaign being run by *The Mail on Sunday* and the responses—more than 30,000—that it has received: it is welcome that the newspaper has taken such a public interest in the issue.

We have sought the advice not only of the Departments to which the hon. Gentleman refers but of others, including environmental health officers, who are very much in the front line. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the conclusions of the working party, which will report in the not too distant future. I am only too aware of the problems of noise, not only in urban but in rural areas, and I intend to do something about them.

Town and Parish Councils

15. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to set up town and parish councils in unparished areas.

Mr. Gummer: I am on record as being very much in favour of parish councils and am looking at ways in which we can enhance their role.

Mr. Rendel: I welcome the Secretary of State's support for parish councils. Regardless of what he does about other recommendations for Berkshire, will he confirm that the strong recommendation for the creation of a parish council for Newbury will be accepted, in line with the long-standing thoughts of local people?

Mr. Gummer: I shall certainly look at that and also at the difficulty under present legislation, which is that if an ancient town already has some sort of trust council it cannot also have parish council status. Many towns want to keep their historic regalia and historic ways of doing things and have the powers that a parish council may give to them. I am looking to see whether we can find a way around that difficulty.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. Friend agree that some areas do not actively seek parish status and that we should not rush down the road of establishing new parishes unless there is clearly a genuine need for doing so?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that some places do not look for this status. However, I hope that we shall encourage those other authorities, district and county councils, which in recent months have made clear their desire to work with parishes and give them greater powers— which, of course, is in their remit—to continue down that road after the announcements of the final decisions on local government reorganisation. I should not like any of those who have promised such co-operation during the run-up to the decisions to forget those promises when they have achieved the status that they sought.

Mr. Pike: Is it the Government's view that a parish council should have the right to levy a precept and that a nation which is a part of the United Kingdom should not have the right to levy a tax?

Mr. Gummer: It is certainly the Government's view that the present arrangements for precepting should continue. However, it is not our view that we should so break up the United Kingdom that there should be tax-levying powers in other parts of it in circumstances in which Members of this House would have no right to ask questions about how those taxes were raised or spent.

Homelessness

16. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he is making with reducing homelessness.

Mr. Curry: Over the past two and a half years, there have been successive reductions in the number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless.

Mr. Nicholson: I am glad to hear that there has been progress on this issue. Does my hon. Friend agree that success in this matter involves co-operation with other Departments, especially the Department of Social Security, and with local authorities and voluntary organisations? Does he further agree that individuals have different reasons for homelessness? In some cases, it may be because of the breakdown in caring community facilities. Would he question the right of people publicly to sleep in the streets and publicly to beg?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that there are many reasons for people being homeless. I am extremely happy to praise the good work of the voluntary organisations in this matter. We depend heavily on them and co-operate successfully with them. It is thanks to their efforts and the partnership which we have created that the figures have come down so dramatically. We wish to make sure that we settle and deal with this problem effectively wherever it occurs.

Mr. Soley: Perhaps the Minister will explain where homeless people are to sleep if it is not on the streets. They do not have anywhere to live. Does he recall a report by the Duke of Edinburgh's committee a few years ago, which was supported by the churches and various other experts on housing, that a loss of 2 million rented sector houses, which are not being replaced, was a primary cause of homelessness and housing queues? Why does he think that he has got it right and both God and the royal family have got it wrong?

Mr. Curry: Clearly, I was not the Minister at that time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] My memory is certainly good enough to recall that. If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the right to buy, he is referring to people who had secure tenancies and were therefore occupying houses which they would have occupied as rented tenants in any case. That means people have not taken houses that would otherwise be available; they are living in the same houses under a different form of tenure.

Rural Challenge

17. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet representatives of parish councils in East Anglia to discuss rural challenge.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Mr. Bellingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that, when dealing with local matters, parish councils often understand much more about rural areas and the needs of their communities than district or county councils? Does he further agree that more influence and weight should be given to parish councils? Will he confirm that when he frames his policies for the countryside, he will listen to local people on matters such as access to the countryside and country sports? Will he pledge to do all that he can to listen to the views of local people in rural areas?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend will have heard my right hon. Friend show his affection for parish councils and I join him and my hon. Friend in that. My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge about the countryside and I shall listen to him, to his constituents and to others with similar views and interests during progress on the White Paper on rural matters, which we intend to publish towards the end of the year.

Housing Statistics

20. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the number of (a) local authority and (b) housing association dwellings started in 1978 and (c) the estimated number in each category for 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Housing associations started 17,900 new dwellings in England in 1978. We estimate that they will have started over 33,000 new dwellings in 1994. English local authorities started 67,600 dwellings in 1978, with new towns starting a further 7,000 dwellings. We estimate that they will start fewer than 500 dwellings in 1994. This change reflects the shift to an enabling role for local authorities with housing associations becoming the main providers of new social housing.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Minister recognise that the comparison between 1978 and today illustrates only too well why so many people face such appalling difficulties in trying to find, usually without any success, affordable rented accommodation? Is he aware that when I leave here in the evening and walk up Whitehall, within five minutes of the Palace of Westminster I see a sight that I certainly did not witness before 1979—people sleeping out in the rain and the cold, because they have no alternative? They are among the victims of the Government's callous housing policy, which has left so many people homeless or near homeless.

Mr. Jones: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the House earlier when I answered a question from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) about waiting lists. I told him that they had fallen substantially.

We cannot cover every blade of grass with new housing development. We must ensure that there is a proper balance between building new homes, with the costs associated with that, and ensuring that existing housing stock is properly used.

Mr. Hendry: Will my hon. Friend confirm that what really matters is the number of new lettings made every year? Will he further confirm that last year there was the highest number of new lettings since 1979? Lettings are on the increase.

Mr. Jones: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a valuable point. Local authorities, with their new enabling role, can ensure that lettings are available not just in the public sector but in the private sector. Some local authorities whose representatives I met during the recent housing investment programme rounds have been much more successful than others at managing to persuade owners of empty properties in the private sector to make them available for rent. I commend that strategy to all local authorities—it is copying the successes of the best.

Mr. Dobson: Why will not the Minister admit that, despite the claim that housing associations have taken on the role of councils, the figures that he has quoted show that the number of houses available for letting by councils and housing associations together has more than halved? Roughly speaking, 50 council houses were built in 1979 for every one that this rotten, mean-minded Government are building today.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman seems to think that money grows on trees. The only suggestion he has for making more money available is to release capital receipts, which would have a dramatic effect on council taxes as well as driving up borrowing. That would be most unsatisfactory in present circumstances. The hon. Gentleman also sets his face against harnessing private money for the redevelopment of housing and the creation of new housing. I commend the large-scale voluntary transfers as a way of getting additional resources for housing.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Do not the figures that my hon. Friend just quoted represent a real achievement in helping the homeless? Do they not make the Labour party's professions on wanting to care for the homeless seem extremely hollow?

Mr. Jones: What the Labour party wants more than anything else is for people to be captives in the public sector, which is the very opposite of our view. We believe that people should realise their aspirations to be home owners or to rent, whichever they want.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

21. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contributions he now expects to the reduction of carbon dioxide required by Rio targets to be contributed by value added tax on domestic fuel, rises in transport fuel duties, action by the Energy Saving Trust, energy conservation measures in building regulations and other schemes.

Mr. Atkins: We are currently reviewing the contributions expected from the measures in our climate change programme in the light of recent developments, and will also be taking account of the revised energy projections on which the Department of Trade and Industry is working. The climate change convention requires us to take measures aimed at returning emissions of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000 and we are committed to fulfilling these requirements.

Mr. Bennett: When will the review be completed? Can the Minister confirm that unless the Energy Saving Trust has some money, it will be unable to carry out any of the work that the Government intend it to do?

Mr. Atkins: As soon as possible, and yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the home energy efficiency savings scheme has been remarkably successful? Many hon. Members have seen equipment installed in constituents' homes. Will he confirm that people are eligible for some £300 of Government assistance if they install energy conservation equipment in their homes? Will he also confirm that the Government will continue the scheme and that it will save a considerable amount of energy?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I have been involved in a scheme at a house in my constituency which I found interesting, and those who have received the grant have certainly been pleased. The scheme was increased substantially last year by an energy-conscious Government and Department, and it will be increased this year by a further £30 million by the energy-conscious Chancellor, Secretary of State and Ministers. We intend to keep our objective because we know—perhaps more than anyone— how important energy efficiency is.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Minister accept that energy in all of its aspects is the central environmental consideration, and that it therefore ought to be the central matter in relation to the environment agency legislation? What proposals do the Government have to ensure that the new agency will be able to offer guidance to other Departments, such as the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Transport, on energy policies?

Mr. Atkins: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman either awaits the passage of the Bill or goes to another place to hear the discussions which are going on about the matter. When the Bill is brought to this place, the hon. Gentleman will find much to excite him.

Local Authority Leaseholders

22. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce measures to assist local authority leaseholders who are encountering difficulty selling their homes.

Mr. Curry: I hope to introduce a revised scheme in the spring.

Mr. Gerrard: That is welcome news. Is the Minister aware that council leaseholders are lobbying here this afternoon and that they have only invited Tory Members as they think that Tory Members need educating about the effects of believing Government propaganda about buying their flats? Some local authorities are willing in principle to buy back the flats of people who were persuaded by the Government to buy their flats and who now find that they cannot sell them, but the authorities cannot because they do not have the capital. Is it not about time that those people were given some help to get out of the trap in which they have found themselves?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman ought to know that the Government are concerned about the position of leaseholders who are unable to raise mortgages on properties which they have bought. We are working hard on a scheme to introduce a more flexible form of agreement which local authorities can use to assist in the sale of flats by indemnifying commercial mortgage lending to new purchasers. We are also looking at an exchange sales scheme to help local authorities to take back certain flats which have been affected by mortgageability difficulties in exchange for selling leaseholders another home more suitable for their needs.

Madam Speaker: Mr. David Tredinnick. Mr. John Spellar. Mr. Rhodri Morgan. Mr. John Battle. It is a total disgrace that Members are absent without apologising either to the Minister or to me.

Planning Legislation

27. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for a review of planning legislation.

Mr. Gummer: I shall consider the need for amending legislation in the light of the Government's imminent response to the report "Shopping Centres and Their Future" by the Select Committee on the Environment, and of the follow-up to the symposium on quality in town and country which I hosted last month.

Mr. Cox: Hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome the Secretary of State's reply, in view of the earlier exchanges. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many of our constituencies are now facing massive supermarket developments, and that there is a real fear of their effect on existing trading centres? Is there not also a fear that the concerns and the opposition of constituents are, frankly, not being listened to?

Mr. Gummer: We are looking carefully at each of the cases. In the first round, it is for the local authority to make the planning decisions. The hon. Gentleman will know that I want to ensure that the balance and bias are towards the invigoration of town and city centres. At the same time, we must ensure that we raise the quality of what we build. Far too often, we have allowed our city centres to be disfigured by poor buildings, built in poor styles and with a poor lifetime ahead of them. I hope soon to be able to see the Marsham street towers in which I work pulled down. It is a bad building which is badly built, and it did not enhance the city centre. I hope that the building into which we will move before we pull that down will be better.

Sewage Outfalls

28. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sewage outfalls into British rivers and the sea discharge untreated sewage, other than by maceration.

Sir Paul Beresford: Some 96 per cent. of the United Kingdom population is connected to a sewerage system. A total of 83 per cent. of sewage is treated and 90 per cent. of this receives secondary treatment or better. The proportions, already high in comparison with those in many continental countries, will rise as a result of investment over the next few years.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Minister accept that there is still a serious problem in our rivers and around our

coast? A recent survey showed that our beaches are not getting any cleaner. Is it not about time that the Government insisted that all river and sea discharges were worth tertiary treatment, so that we do not have the problems that have been experienced on, for example, the Gower peninsula where there has been possible infection as a result of sewage discharges into Carmarthen bay? Is it not time that we tackled this problem seriously by insisting on tertiary treatment of all sewage discharges?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman should put the matter into perspective. Compared with other countries, the United Kingdom is among the highest in the provision of treatment. Given the nature of the climate, the beaches are much cleaner than the hon. Gentleman is insinuating. We must tackle a problem such as this in the nature of priorities.

Mr. Skinner: What is the Minister doing here? He is supposed to be pulling teeth.

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) obviously requires a dentist. I am prepared to see him free of charge—not even under the national health service—and extract his teeth without a local anaesthetic.

Madam Speaker: On that note, time is up.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you will inquire into a matter that does not seem to be anybody's responsibility, but is clearly a House of Commons matter. In the front of the House of Commons parliamentary diary, there is a list of notable dates, many of which will be found in any diary in the land. However, it also includes some which are not found in other diaries and which are inappropriate. They include the dates for the end of pheasant and partridge shooting, the expiry of game licences, the beginning of grouse and partridge shooting, and the end of grouse shooting, but, most importantly, "fox hunting begins" is in the diary as a notable date. That diary bears the name of this place, has the portcullis on the cover and is sold here. I have received a complaint about that. I wonder whether in future years you can rule that we should not have such controversial and, arguably, unacceptable practices publicised in documents bearing the coat of arms of the House of Commons.

Madam Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman certain that it is a House of Commons diary? Perhaps he will let me see it. He might refer the matter to the appropriate Committee, which I think is the Administration Committee, rather than raise it on the Floor of the House. Perhaps next year we can put my birthday in the diary so that I might expect flowers all round.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am looking forward to sending you flowers on the appropriate day. May I assist you on another matter? I am an enthusiastic supporter of your campaign for terser questions at Question Time. Have you noticed that on the past four occasions when questions have been asked by Members from Welsh and Scottish constituencies, Ministers have been instructed to add a coda to their answers, saying that they could not answer the question if there was Welsh and Scottish decentralisation? That is a campaign which wastes time at Question Time. It is unfair because hon. Members cannot answer such a statement and it is tedious and futile.

Madam Speaker: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is trying to co-operate with me in seeking brisker questions and answers. I shall continue to ensure that that happens at every Question Time. I am sure that it is a great advantage to Back Benchers—I can call more of them if answers are brisk and questions are equally so.

Protection of Animals (Amendment)

3.34 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1954 to require the courts to order the disqualification for life from owning animals for any person convicted of severe cruelty to a companion animal.

I have no pecuniary interest in this matter, but I have the honour to hold the British Horse Society's award of merit for outstanding services to the horse world. Clearly, the British Horse Society is concerned with the welfare of horses.

Millions of pets are kept in Britain and, thankfully, most of them are loved and well cared for. Whatever they are—dogs, hamsters or budgies—they all play a special part in people's lives. It is well established that pet owners and pet lovers generally live longer and more healthily than others, so they gain much from their pets.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have two cats.

Mr. Greenway: In that case, my hon. Friend will live a long time. However, it is, sadly, not true that all companion animals are loved and well cared for. In 1993, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals secured 3,065 convictions against people who caused cruelty to animals in their care, the very animals that rely on human intervention for their welfare needs.

The House should be in no doubt that the cruelty inflicted on animals comes in many forms. Animals may be starved through neglect, viciously beaten, left to die in hot cars, denied urgent veterinary treatment or simply thrown from a building for the fun of it. Some of the cases that come to court defy belief. For example, a dog died after being locked in a microwave; a cat was thrown from the top of a cathedral; a hamster was held under hot water, thrown against a wall and then sealed in an airtight container before being dumped in a freezer; and a kitten had its claws removed by a 12-year-old boy before being thrown into a freezing pond.

However, it is not only the domestic pet that suffers at the hands of cruel owners. Some people take pleasure in organising illegal events such as dog fights and cock fights. They are evil forms of sport—so-called—which cause enormous suffering to the animals involved. Incidentally, such events are a growing problem in the west London area and elsewhere, and all in the name of sport.

What price do people pay for inflicting needless cruelty on animals? The maximum penalty is six months in prison and/or a £5,000 fine.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What about calves in crates?

Mr. Greenway: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. The cruelty caused to calves kept in crates is unacceptable and the country will not tolerate it. I am glad that the Government are examining what can be done, but we must keep up the pressure.

As I was saying, the maximum penalty for cruelty to animals is six months in prison and/or a £5,000 fine.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): It is not enough.

Mr. Greenway: I agree that such penalties are not sufficient but even they are used only in cases of the most

[Mr. Greenway]

severe cruelty. If someone is convicted of cruelty, no matter how sickening, it is possible for him to continue to be allowed to own animals. At the moment, magistrates can order a ban on the ownership of animals, but that option is used in only a small percentage of cases.

In a recent RSPCA cruelty case, a Kent man pleaded guilty to causing unnecessary suffering to a friend's Jack Russell. In a statement to an RSPCA inspector, the man admitted kicking and beating the dog. When the inspector found the dog, it was lying outside an oven covered in grease. Traces of dog hairs were found inside the oven. Yet the man responsible for causing that appalling suffering was banned from keeping animals for only five years. In 1999 he will be able to keep pets again.

In another recent case, a young foal was fitted with a head collar when it was a few weeks old. As the foal grew, naturally, so did its head, but the noseband did not. After a while the noseband began to eat into the flesh on the animals' face, causing enormous pain—so much so that the poor creature could not bear to open its mouth to suckle from its mother. The penalty for knowingly inflicting such pain was a derisory fine. The owners were not imprisoned, nor did they receive suspended prison sentences, but they knew what they were doing. Our legal system allowed them to continue keeping horses and, to my knowledge, they still own four horses.

If such astonishing cruelty is hard to understand, it is even harder to punish. How can it be right that someone convicted of mindless cruelty should hear the magistrate order an RSPCA inspector to hand the animal back to the guilty party? How can we stand for that? It is not right or just. Anyone convicted of causing cruelty to animals should be banned for life from owning another such animal. What can be done?

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): We should treat them in the same way.

Mr. Greenway: The point is taken.

A mandatory life ban on keeping companion animals for those convicted of causing cruelty must be introduced. That will serve to protect animals that have already been mistreated and will prevent people causing more suffering in future. That is the basis of my Bill. I seek to extend the principle that already exists and is enforceable, and to make it compulsory—a life ban from keeping companion animals for those convicted of cruelty.

I am grateful to you for your indulgence, Madam Speaker, and for having this opportunity to raise the matter in the House. I know that many of my constituents feel extremely strongly about it. I hope that in years to come I and other hon. Members will not need to return to this issue to highlight further cruelty and suffering, when a sensible and rational change in the law will offer magistrates the power to penalise that minority of people who have so little regard for an animal's suffering. That will go a long way towards stamping out a serious and malicious evil.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Nigel Waterson, Dame Jill Knight, Sir Marcus Fox, Mr. Menzies Campbell, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Sebastian Coe, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Michael Stephen, Mr. Richard Spring and Mr. John Marshall.

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Harry Greenway accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1954 to require the courts to order the disqualification for life from owning animals for any person convicted of severe cruelty to a companion animal: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 February and to be printed. [Bill 36.]

Opposition Day

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

Through Ticketing under Rail Privatisation

Madam Speaker: We now come to the first debate on the Opposition motions. I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister. I have not thought it right in this debate to limit speeches to 10 minutes, but I ask Back Benchers to exercise voluntary restraint in their speeches. In the spirit of the Jopling report, I also ask for the co-operation of Front Benchers to give Back Benchers opportunities to speak.

3.44 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, noting the repeated assurances already given by Ministers that it will be mandatory for rail operators to ensure through-ticketing following the franchising of passenger services, calls upon Her Majesty's Government to guarantee that these promises will be honoured.

The aim of the motion is clear, simple and straightforward: that the unequivocal commitments that Ministers have made on several occasions that through ticketing will be fully maintained after privatisation shall be honoured. During the Second Reading of the Railways Bill on 2 February 1993, the then Minister for Public Transport, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), stated in the clearest terms:

"we have said that it will be mandatory for rail operators to ensure through ticketing."

Later in the same speech he reiterated that point even more clearly when he said:

"Through ticketing will be mandatory through the licensing system. Anyone who wants to run a passenger train service must ensure that through tickets are available for all journeys. That will be an obligation."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 242-58.]

On discounts, he further added:

"I firmly believe that discounts on through tickets, which amount to 10 or 20 per cent. off the sum of the fares on individual lines, will continue. The intention is to continue to use British Rail's ticket issuing machinery."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 258.]

Similar binding commitments were given in another place. On Second Reading in their Lordships' House on 15 June 1993, Lord Caithness, speaking for the Government, stated:

"Through ticketing will continue to operate across the network and operators will be required to participate in common ticketing and revenue allocation arrangements."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 June 1993; Vol. 546, c. 1428.]

In all those commitments, Ministers simply confirmed Government policy as it was expressly laid down in the White Paper of summer 1992. Paragraph 88 of the White Paper on network benefits states:

"The Government is concerned to ensure that, so far as possible, passengers and freight customers continue to enjoy the advantages they get from a national rail system, including through ticketing, cross validity,"—

I think that that is another word for inter-availability—

"discounted fares, and a national timetable. This will be taken into account in the arrangements made for timetabling and ticketing."

But Ministers went even further than that. In March 1994, the Department of Trade and Industry issued a leaflet for general distribution to the public entitled "Franchising of Rail Passenger Services". It is written in the form of questions and answers:

"Can I still buy a through ticket to any destination?
Yes. Through tickets will continue to be available as at present."

I do not think that it could be any clearer than that.

Time and again, Ministers in both places have repeatedly made unequivocal commitments that, following the franchising of passenger services, through ticketing will continue to be available on exactly the same basis as at present. I remind the House that through tickets are now available at more than 1,300 stations throughout the country.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way at such an early point in his speech. What does he mean by "on exactly the same basis"? I understand that, of about 2,500 stations in the British Rail system at present, only 440 offer a full through-ticketing and seat reservation service.

Mr. Meacher: The fact is that 1,316 stations are staffed and 1,580 stations currently offer through ticketing in one form or another. The Department's literature made it clear that arrangements would continue "as at present". That is what we are talking about; that is the key issue in today's debate.

It was reported 10 days ago that the Rail Regulator was expected to limit the purchase of through tickets to just 294 core stations throughout the network. That produced an immediate and strong reaction from the Secretary of State, and I give him credit for that. On the Saturday he issued a press release saying:

"If the regulator is proposing that the number of stations offering through ticketing should be fewer than now,"—

I emphasise those words—

"that is unacceptable. There must be an improvement".

Presumably, he was referring to an improvement on the current position. However, 48 hours later he was back-pedalling fast. On Monday, he was forced to make the humiliating admission that the Rail Regulator, not the Minister, would have the final word in determining the number of stations offering through ticketing. With that admission, echoed several times by the Prime Minister and again yesterday, all the proud boasts, which have regularly been repeated by Ministers, that network benefits would be fully preserved under privatisation, collapsed ignominiously like a pack of cards.

As hon. Members will know, the right hon. Gentleman has sought to cover his embarrassment by putting forward three defences of his position. Each repays some examination. First, he makes out that the Rail Regulator's proposals are purely consultative, but even a cursory reading of the Rail Regulator's report can leave no one in any doubt that the other two options are purely tacked on as a cosmetic in order to allay the political furore that the main proposal provokes.

I presume that the Secretary of State is perfectly well aware that Mr. Swift devotes no fewer than 21 pages of his document to the issues arising from putting a limit on 294 core stations, while the other two options— one of which is to leave things as they are— get fewer than four pages. The thrust of the document is about eroding the

[Mr. Meacher]

number of through-ticketing stations and the only argument is about how far and how fast that can be achieved. The document is consultative in name only.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that at present not only stations sell through tickets, but that there is a large network of travel agencies and telephone sales? Does he also accept that it would be in the interests of private operators to ensure that they get the best possible access to their potential customers of through tickets? Does not he accept, therefore, that there are ways of providing through tickets other than just through stations?

Mr. Meacher: No one is objecting if there is an improvement on the present position and there are more outlets for the sale of through tickets. We are objecting to the fact that the number of stations, which are used overwhelmingly for the purchase of through tickets, will be dramatically reduced.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Meacher: Anyone who reads the Rail Regulator's report knows perfectly well that that is the direction in which policy will go and, as I shall explain, the Secretary of State cannot stop it.

The right hon. Gentleman's second defence is that the Rail Regulator is laying down no more than minimum standards with which train operators must comply. He wants to believe that private operators will go further of their own accord. They may to some degree do so, but that is not the point.

Ministers gave repeated commitments, and their publicly distributed literature made it clear that through ticketing would continue as at present, and at present it is available at more than 1,300 stations across the country. They insisted that services for passengers would improve after privatisation, but no amount of fantasising by the Secretary of State will lead private operators to increase the number of through-ticketing stations to anywhere near 1,300.

The Rail Regulator has pulled the rug from under the Secretary of State when he concedes that private operators are unlikely to want to be burdened by excessive costs. The truth is that the Secretary of State's defence that minimum standards will be substantially bettered does not cut ice even with the regulator.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The hon. Gentleman mentioned minimum standards. Can he assist the House by saying what British Rail's present minimum standard is?

Mr. Meacher: I am well aware that one feeble excuse made by the Secretary of State is that there is no statutory binding commitment at present. The point is that the public know that they can go into more than 1,300 stations and buy a ticket to any destination that they choose. That facility will be eroded by the regulator's proposals.

The Secretary of State's third defence is that he can issue formal guidance to the regulator. Although that is true, it is worthless because the regulator does not have to comply. In Committee, Ministers reserved to themselves the power to override the regulator in two specific respects—the granting of exclusive franchises and the limiting of track access charges. Significantly, both powers were designed to restrict competition on behalf of franchise bidders, not to assist passengers. The key point is that there are no other specific respects in which the Secretary of State can override the regulator.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that this debate is the most appalling waste of time? Franchisees will want to maximise their ticket sales. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the post-nationalised British Airways and the Galileo system. The hon. Gentleman will find that computerised booking systems for every form of transport are developing fast throughout the world. At a time when national lottery tickets are available at petrol stations, newsagents and the like, through on-line computer terminals, this debate is farcical. We are entering a world of thousands of outlets.

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman is so convinced that commitments made by Ministers can be guaranteed and will be honoured, we shall be glad to welcome him in our Lobby tonight.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I support the hon. Gentleman in putting it to the Government that the system has already broken down. A letter dated 14 January, but which arrived on 16 January, bears out the fact that the commitment to a national network timetable has not been honoured. If one asks for an InterCity timetable at Waterloo station, one is told that Waterloo is not an InterCity station and is given a telephone number, which one must call to request a timetable to be sent. If the network provision of services is to be guaranteed by the regulator, does not the hon. Gentleman agree that the regulator has already failed?

Mr. Meacher: I shall refer later to many aspects of the beginning of the erosion of inter-availability and national timetabling systems.

Ministers have repeatedly affirmed that there will be no reduction in through ticketing after privatisation. The regulator, on the other hand, is clearly determined to reduce core stations offering through ticketing to perhaps as few as one in eight of Britain's 2,500 stations—and the Secretary of State cannot lift a finger to stop him. The right hon. Gentleman, in all his splendid isolation and irrelevance, sits there like a beached whale. He is a monument to the crass ineptitude of a privatisation that is fast running out of control. The fact is that the right hon. Gentleman is wholly unable to carry through the commitments that his predecessors gave, and he is being humiliated by what the regulator is doing.

The absurdity goes even further. We are told that the list of 294 was drawn up using a set of criteria to ensure that the key towns and cities, airports and recognised commercial centres would have core stations. The bizarre result is that travellers will be able to buy tickets to any destination from the Kyle of Lochalsh—a little-used station that is also a port on the west coast of Scotland—or from Ryde Esplanade on the Isle of Wight, or from Llandrindod Wells in mid-Wales, through which only three trains a day pass.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Spell it.

Mr. Meacher: Conservative Members are being exceedingly silly, because they know that they have no defence against the thrust of our argument. They are

deeply embarrassed by the way in which commitments have been given, which the Government are now totally incapable of carrying through.

At the same time, some of the stations at which ticket sales will be limited are among the busiest in Britain. They include Lichfield in Staffordshire, with two stations and 185 trains a day. It will have no core station. Yeovil in Somerset, a base for Britain's aerospace industry, will be without one, too. Under the regulator's proposals, there will be an 88-mile stretch between Salisbury and Exeter, with Yeovil at its centre, with no core station. Thus a passenger wishing to travel from Yeovil to Birmingham will have to detour to Bristol or to Swindon to get a through ticket. [*Laughter.*] I agree, it is laughable. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) is right to laugh. It is an absurdity that beggars belief.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): The Labour party Front-Bench spokesman has been kind enough to show that party's quinquennial interest in my constituency by naming a few stations there. My constituents are convinced that the privatisation of the railway industry will be as successful as the privatisation of British Airways. The railway industry will have a chance to compete, just as BA and BT compete. The hon. Gentleman is stuck in the steam train era.

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for that intervention. The whole House would like to know how the hon. Gentleman intends to justify to his constituents the fact that two of the stations in his constituency, Hebden Bridge and Todmorden, core stations at present, will, under the regulator's proposals, cease to be so. Perhaps he will explain that to the House—if he catches Madam Speaker's eye.

It beggars belief that it is seriously intended, as part of the privatisation of the rail system, that the number of stations selling through tickets should be reduced by 80 per cent; and that as a result people will be expected, when necessary, to divert to another station on the same line—or even, from there, to another station on another line. They must then get off the train to buy a through ticket. Having purchased it, they will almost certainly find that their train has already departed, and they will have to wait for the next connection. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Secretary of State would like to tell us why he finds that so funny. Millions of rail passengers will find it quite intolerable. The fact that the right hon. Gentleman sits there giggling just shows his contempt for millions of people around this country.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): Subject to catching Madam Speaker's eye, I shall have an opportunity to respond.

Mr. Meacher: Instead of the Secretary of State looking so pleased with himself, perhaps he will accept that I should be pleased if, on this crucial issue, he intervened in my speech. I should be glad to give way to him. Perhaps he would like to explain. We shall be waiting for his explanation, but noting that he seems extraordinarily reluctant to give it following my offer to allow him to intervene.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No. I am concerned with the Secretary of State.

Is the right hon. Gentleman seriously telling us that what I have described is the new Tory vision of a smart and efficient railway system, or if it is not, that there is nothing that he can do to stop it happening?

On Monday, the Prime Minister at his press conference, which I believe was designed to prop up sagging Conservative party morale, announced that he intended to turn Britain's railways from a stand-up comedian's joke into the envy of the world. Not for the first time, the irony of the situation seems to be sadly lost on the Prime Minister. It is he and his policies that are the stand-up comedian's joke. Proposals such as the one that we are discussing are making him and his Government the laughing stock of the western world. Even Harry Enfield could not have managed to produce a better script.

Why are the Government in such a position? It is not because the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State are stupid. None the less, they obviously fail to recognise the consequences of their policies.

The internal contradictions of privatisation are driving events in the direction that I outlined.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on his point about internal contradictions?

Mr. Meacher: I do not believe for a moment that the hon. Gentleman will intervene on that point. He has been persistent, however, in his efforts to intervene, and I am glad to give way to him.

Mr. Brandreth: When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wants to make an announcement about his policy on the railways, he at least makes it himself, whereas the Leader of the Opposition has his press secretary sort it out for him.

The hon. Gentleman is either being mischievous or is hopelessly muddled. We are talking about a consultation document. A minimum standard is being talked about. Two of the purposes of the exercise of privatisation are to improve service and to increase the availability of tickets. That is what the thrust will be. The hon. Gentleman must understand and recognise that. That is why we find what he is saying risible. There is no thrust to his argument. He is tilting at illusory windmills.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is not a silly man—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Oh yes he is.

Mr. Meacher: He is not silly by the standards of Conservative Members, but he is being disingenuous. If the Government's proposals are about improving standards, why is it that there is not one line in the regulator's report about improving the current system? The report is all about worsening it. The only issue is the degree to which and the speed with which that will come about. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that a consultative exercise is taking place, perhaps he is sillier than I thought. If he reads the report, he will find that it is clearly about severely reducing the number of stations that can offer through ticketing. The key point is that, consultative exercise or whatever, the Secretary of State cannot stop whatever the regulator decides to implement.

Why are the Government in such a situation? The regulator did not propose 294 stations because—

[Mr. Meacher]

Mr. Kynoch: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall not give way again.

The regulator did not make that proposal because he wanted to improve—

Mr. Kynoch: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman and I shall not give way again.

The reason—

Mr. Kynoch *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Meacher: The regulator did not propose 294 core stations because he wanted to improve services for passengers. That never entered his head. When asked whether he considered that passengers should be no more than an hour's drive from a core station selling through tickets, he said, amazingly enough, that he had considered that, but he thought that the value of such a criterion "was not obvious".

The irrelevance of the interests of passengers could hardly be clearer. The reason why the regulator wants to cut the number of core stations by 80 per cent.—meaning that people will be forced to travel up to 50 miles out of their way to buy a through ticket, which is of absolutely no interest to him—is to secure a sale of the passenger franchises at any cost.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Gentleman persists like that, I shall certainly not give way.

Mr. Evans: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Opposition spokesman told the House a moment ago that the regulator's report did not mention improvements in services at all, whereas—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order at all. It is a point of argument. It is not a matter for me what the regulator says. There has been no breach of Standing Orders or of our procedures here.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton) *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) must try to correct the Opposition spokesman in debate, not through a point of order.

Mr. Streeter: But surely when an hon. Member misleads the House—

Madam Speaker: Order. Let me try to explain the art of debate in Parliament. If hon. Members feel that another hon. Member is quoting incorrectly or is giving incorrect information, the way to correct that is to catch my eye. That is the way to do it, not through a point of order. Do we all understand now how points of order should be used and what the art of debate is? Very good.

Mr. Meacher: Before those bogus points of order were made, I was explaining that the real motive for what the House is debating today is to secure the sale of the passenger franchises at any cost. That is what underpins the debate. The Secretary of State said on 14 December that he intended to effect the sale of at least 50 per cent. of those franchises by April 1996. The fact is that there is such investor apathy about the sales that minimising the conditions that franchisees must meet, as in through ticketing, is a vital part of the exercise, and the interests of the passengers come absolutely nowhere. That is the first reason why this zany proposal has emerged.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman sees any correlation between the argument that he is making now and what happened with British Gas. Is he aware that British Gas closed a number of showrooms in which people could pay their gas bills, but at the same time it did a deal with the Post Office, which means that there are 20,000 new places where people can pay their bills? Does he regard that as an improvement for the customer or a decline in the service? I regard it as an improvement.

Mr. Meacher: I do not think that there is any parallel at all, for the simple reason that people expect to be able to go to stations to buy through tickets. If they can buy them at the local taxi company or the local showroom, fine, but that is not an acceptable substitute for a reduction of 80 per cent. in the number of through-ticket stations.

There is a second reason, too, for this ridiculous proposal. If one breaks up an integrated national rail system into 85 different companies, which is what the Government are doing, one is forced to devolve ultimate power in policing the railways to an independent regulator and his staff, to prevent the conflicting interests that have been unleashed getting out of control. Once one gives such power to an unelected quango, one is handing over to an unaccountable body extremely sensitive political decisions that should be taken only by a political representative. But that, of course, is precisely the logic of privatisation. That is why it is so flawed. That is why a large and growing majority of the population is so passionately opposed to this privatisation.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No. I shall not give way again.

Those people know that it is madness to split up a single integrated rail system into 85 separate, conflicting companies, which will produce a mountain of bureaucracy. They are opposed because they do not want the regulatory and safety framework of the railways undermined. They are opposed because they know that services will have to be cut drastically in order to generate the profits that shareholders demand, pushing the railways into a vicious spiral where higher fares will lead to fewer passengers, which will then force fares still higher. They are opposed to £700 million being frittered away in City and legal fees, money that could have been far better spent on redressing crumbling investment.

A growing majority of the population is opposed because there are no guarantees on season tickets or off-peak fares, because inter-availability is already being eroded and because the blight on investment imposed by privatisation is already producing serious damage. Temporary speed limits have had to be imposed on several lines because major track renewal work is simply not being done. Back-up for train breakdowns has been cut to the bone, so that one lost train can now wreck a day's timetable as cancellations and delays build up and,

as we found in our recent survey, trains are increasingly having to run on no spares, so that branch line trains are having to be transferred to keep busier lines operating.

In his amendment to our motion, the Secretary of State talks about his plans to reverse the decline in rail use. But the facts are clear. The biggest barrier to greater rail use in Britain at present is the Secretary of State and his privatisation plans. The large-scale abandonment of through-ticketing stations is but the first of the disasters that will hit millions of passengers if rail privatisation is allowed to proceed.

The regulator has made a monkey of the Secretary of State and all that the right hon. Gentleman can do is to repeat plaintively that it was Parliament that decided that there should be a regulator. He has made no mention of the fact that it was not Parliament but Ministers who decided to privatise the railways in the first place, not Parliament but Ministers who decided that there should be 85 separate companies that required regulation, and not Parliament but the Secretary of State's predecessor who guaranteed that through ticketing would be fully protected in the privatised system.

It is Ministers who have produced this mess. It is Parliament that can still stop it. In the 60 most marginal Tory seats, there are now 173 stations. Under the regulator's proposals, only 24 of those will be core stations selling through tickets. Tory Members of Parliament have a clear and straight choice tonight. Either they take the Secretary of State at his word that any cut in through ticketing would be unacceptable and support our motion, or they support the Whips and vote down their constituents. But I give them this warning. This is a campaign on which we shall not let up until we have stopped this detested privatisation in its tracks by the next election.

4.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"reaffirms the Government's commitment to maintaining through ticketing; welcomes the publication by the Rail Regulator of the Consultation Document 'Retailing of Tickets at Stations'; endorses the view expressed in the document that the continuation of network benefits such as through ticketing 'will be one of the key tests of the success of the restructuring of the industry'; notes that despite massive investment in British Rail the proportion of travel undertaken and freight moved by train has steadily decreased during nationalisation; and supports the Government's commitment to seeking to reverse this decline through the creation of a flourishing railway system operated by the private sector which will offer a better deal for passengers and for freight customers.".

I have always thought that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) wanted to enter the Labour party's hall of fame of bons mots which go down in history and are remembered, such as that of the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), on the Gas Bill, who said:

"There is no evidence that the Bill will . . . produce cheaper gas".—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 780.]

or that of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who said that the British Steel Bill was

"totally irrelevant to the real interests of the industry, and it is based on dogma. The Labour party is unequivocally, implacably opposed to it".—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 238.]

About British Airways, the same hon. Gentleman said:

"It will be the pantomime horse of capitalism if it is anything at all."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1979; Vol. 974, c. 125.]

I invite my hon. Friends to read *Hansard* tomorrow and perhaps we can have a ballot on which of the statements made today by the hon. Member for Oldham, West will go down alongside those bons mots of expressions of Labour party policy. I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman because he has not had a comfortable week. Last Wednesday, this debate seemed like a good idea to him. I bet that he regrets it now.

Last week, the hon. Gentleman appeared to be in charge of Labour's policy—whatever it is. Today, the whole country knows that it is not the hon. Gentleman who controls Labour's policy, but the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). On Sunday afternoon, it was the hon. Gentleman who was to be on Monday morning's "Today" programme with me; by Sunday evening, he had been dumped.

Today's debate is entitled "Through Ticketing under Rail Privatisation". I wish to deal with the issue of through ticketing first, but I assure Opposition Members that I shall then deal with the privatisation issue, as did the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Who is in charge of the Government's policy? Why did the Government make so many promises to maintain through ticketing, and then hand over that policy to an unelected, unaccountable regulator?

Dr. Mawhinney: If the hon. Gentleman waits a moment, he will have the answer to his question.

The Government's commitment to through ticketing is absolutely clear: it has been a constant theme of our privatisation proposals. It was in our 1992 election manifesto, and in the White Paper that we published in July of that year; it was reiterated when we introduced our legislation at the beginning of 1993, and it is now in the Railways Act. Section 4 of that Act places a duty on the Secretary of State to promote measures to facilitate journeys involving more than one operator, and states specifically that through ticketing is one such measure. The same duty applies equally to the regulator, and it was in the exercise of that duty that he published his consultation document on the retailing of tickets at stations.

I should also remind the House that the regulator issues licences under a general authority from the Secretary of State. The general authority issued to him on 31 March last year makes it clear that he is obliged to include through-ticketing requirements in the licences that he issues.

In addition, Parliament has given the regulator responsibility for protecting passengers' interests, and the decision on what ticket retailing requirements should be imposed is for him, although it is open to me to give him guidance under the Railways Act. Incidentally, the hon. Member for Oldham, West was wrong: the regulator is not free to ignore that guidance as though it had not been given. He is under a statutory obligation to take account of it.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the Secretary of State give way?

[Mr. George Stevenson]

Dr. Mawhinney: Not yet. As I have said, the regulator is under a statutory obligation. In other circumstances, the hon. Member for Oldham, West has ascribed some importance to that.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I will in a moment.

As the regulator is turning his mind to the issue of ticket retailing for the first time, he has decided to issue a consultation document to establish the views of those who would be affected by the requirements—the operators and, importantly, the passengers.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I said that I would give way in a moment.

That is an entirely new development. In the past, no one consulted passengers about the kind of ticket retailing requirements that they wanted from the railways. Again for the first time, the regulator proposes that passengers should have guarantees that a specific level of ticket retailing service will be safeguarded.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I said that I would in a moment. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make a little progress, I will come back to him.

Neither of the two new services that I have just described operated in the old public-sector railway, and both are characteristic of the future rather than of the past.

The regulator's document contains three options—a requirement that operators maintain the current ticketing arrangements unless they can justify any changes to the regulator; the designation of core stations that will be required to offer the full range of ticketing facilities, with operators left free to decide what services to offer at other stations; and a two-tier approach, with core stations providing the full range of tickets and a less demanding requirement to be placed on other stations. The regulator is not committed to any particular option. He will carefully consider the responses that he receives before reaching any decision. The hon. Gentleman should be more careful about what he says in public about the regulator than he was in the debate. I shall quote what the regulator said on "Newsnight" on 11 January because, as my hon. Friends will understand, it goes precisely to the heart of the hon. Gentleman's argument and blows it away. The regulator said:

"I have never committed myself to a plan to reduce the number of stations at which through tickets can be bought to 294. That is absolutely absurd."

Mr. Stevenson: I was a bit worried that the Secretary of State might have gone beyond this point before giving way. Given his commitment that the present level of through ticketing would be maintained, if after the consultation the regulator produces a plan to reduce the availability, what will the Secretary of State do to maintain the commitment?

Dr. Mawhinney: The Leader of the Opposition put that question to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday, and the Prime Minister answered in exactly the same terms as I have answered. It is all in the record for the hon. Gentleman to read. *[Interruption.]*

The regulator and I have the same statutory objective: we both want an improvement in passenger services. The idea, which is absurd—to use the regulator's word—that the hon. Member for Oldham, West has been peddling to the House does not fall within the statutory remit that the House gave to the regulator. The hon. Gentleman needs to understand that that is the essence of the consultation document.

If I were to tell the House that there would be so many stations providing a certain service at a certain cost on certain days, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends would say, "Why have a regulator and a consultation process in the first place? Why is the Secretary of State standing at the Dispatch Box and undermining the regulator's role?" That is exactly the point that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made yesterday to the Leader of the Opposition.

If the Opposition had voted in Committee against having a regulator with such powers perhaps the House would be more impressed by their arguments now.

Mr. Stevenson: I am trying to help the Secretary of State because he is clearly in a hole of his own making. I thought that he would have reached the part of his script that would have given me some answers but he has not, so I will repeat the question. If, after the consultation, the regulator comes up with a reduced number of stations that can provide through ticketing, what will the Secretary of State do to honour the commitment given by him and by the Prime Minister to maintain the present level? Will the right hon. Gentleman please answer the question?

Dr. Mawhinney: I do not propose to anticipate what the regulator will produce by way of a response. I reaffirm to the hon. Gentleman the statutory requirement that through ticketing will be available and will be maintained. I remind him that I have the opportunity to provide statutory guidance to the regulator on that point, if I judge it necessary. So that everybody understands it, the fundamental difference between us is that we have plans to create an environment in which it will be advantageous for operators to do what passengers want. The hon. Gentleman is firmly in the grip of those trade unionists who want no change and, indeed, want to go backwards.

I reaffirm that I have also made it clear that the idea that the retailing of through tickets should be restricted to 294 stations is unacceptable. The regulator and I are as one on that. As he said in the same interview from which I have already quoted:

"So far as I am concerned there is no difference at all between my objectives and the objectives of the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, that is to get better value for the passengers and better services."

Lest anyone doubt the regulator's commitment to ensuring that passengers' interests are protected, I shall quote from his document, which states:

"Privatisation and restructuring of the railways are intended to improve services to customers and stimulate innovation. In looking at new proposals to replace British Rail's current arrangements I will want to be satisfied that they are likely to achieve these objectives."

He also said:

"In going out to consultation on the issue of ticket retailing at stations, I want to be satisfied that there will be a better rail network and better use of the network by reason of the decisions I take."

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): As the Secretary of State appears to be incapable of dealing with reasonable questions from my hon. Friends, which reflect the genuine concerns of our constituents, I shall put a simple question to him. What advice would he give to my 81-year-old father who lives in Yeovil, has no credit card and so would not be able to make telephone bookings and who regularly travels to Bristol to visit me? How would he get his tickets?

Dr. Mawhinney: I advise the gentleman to do two things—first, not to vote for his local Member of Parliament, and secondly, not to listen to his daughter. What his daughter and her right hon. and hon. Friends are doing is trying to scare him into believing that something will be the case when in fact the very Act of Parliament on which the proposal is based makes it clear that our aim is to produce a better service rather than a worse one.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Labour party should make it absolutely plain this afternoon that the price of a deal between Labour and the trades union bosses is the handing over of British Rail under a Labour Government—if there were to be one—to be run by the trades unions?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend anticipates what I had already warned the House would form the second part of my speech. After I deal with through ticketing I shall deal with privatisation.

The regulator is proposing minimum obligatory standards which will be imposed on operators. That is also new. Under its old nationalised structure British Rail was under no such obligations. The same was true for other aspects of its operations. It was free to vary levels of service—and it did—subject only to very general constraints such as the statutory closure procedures. The railway operated under a system of bureaucratic centralised control with BR taking all the decisions—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Oldham, West need not sigh; it happens to be the truth. It is slightly depressing that he does not recognise the truth.

Under privatisation things are improving. Not only will passengers get better services, they will have specific safeguards for levels of service. Henceforth, passenger services will be provided under franchise agreements that provide clear contractual obligations that operators have to meet, unlike now. They will have to provide a specified level of service set out in the passenger service requirement. They will have to meet specific standards of punctuality and reliability, unlike now. They will have to provide discounted travel for the elderly, young and disabled and—where necessary—there will be safeguards against excessive fare increases. So under privatisation passengers can look to enjoy not just better, more efficient services, but greater security that the railways will be run for their benefit.

Let me repeat—the regulator is seeking to establish a minimum requirement to act as a safeguard. I do not believe that that minimum will in any way become the norm. It is self-evidently in the interests of operators to make their tickets widely available. Indeed, it will be more in their interests to do that in the future than it is in BR's interests now.

Mr. McLoughlin: Is not the difference between the Government and the Labour party that we are not prepared to see the railway industry fossilised, as it has been for some time? Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents are not bothered if they buy their rail tickets at a station? They want to know that they have access to tickets, whether from a shopping centre or a railway station.

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is exactly right.

Ticket retailing will be an important part of a franchisee's business. It is his main interface with his customer. I expect operators to build on the current arrangements, using the new technology available to provide a better ticket retailing service to passengers. They do not need to be told that. No one tells the airline industry how to retail its tickets, but it has developed sophisticated, flexible and highly effective ticketing systems admirably suited to the needs of its customers. I believe that the privatised railway will do the same.

I confirm the point made earlier by some of my hon. Friends. There is a widespread myth that all BR stations provide a full range of ticketing facilities. Even now, ticket availability at individual stations is restricted by limitations on staff resources, fares information about remote journeys and ticket-issuing equipment. At least 1,200 of BR's stations are totally unmanned and offer no staffed ticketing facility, and only about 440 stations have direct access to the seat reservation data.

Ticket retailing will not be confined to stations. Some operators will choose to sell tickets on trains. Telephone sales will become more usual. There will continue to be sales through self-service ticket machines, and travel agents will have a role to play. Large organisations with staff using the railways will continue to be able to use travel warrants.

So the position is clear. Through ticketing will be maintained and passengers can have an influence on its form by responding to the regulator's consultative document. For the first time in history, they can influence the sort of service that they would like to enjoy. Passengers will enjoy an expanding range of services as franchisees develop policies to satisfy existing passengers and to attract new ones.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham) *rose—*

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: Not at the moment.

More broadly, competition on the railways will offer passengers and freight customers a better deal. Do not take just my word for it. I remember being impressed by an impassioned speech which I heard at a party conference in Blackpool a few years ago. The speaker said:

"Nothing would more stimulate a change of attitude to the travelling passenger, than allowing a little competition for the privilege of our custom".

I agree. That is why we are privatising the railways.

Incidentally, the House will want to know that those words were spoken by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats. He

[Dr. Mawhinney]

seems to have changed his mind. What is the right hon. Gentleman's policy today? Does he still want to see competition on our railways? If so, he and his hon. Friends will be voting with the Government this evening. If he does not, it will come as no surprise to my hon. Friends. His party does not change. It says one thing in one place and does something different somewhere else. Never judge a Liberal by his words—just look at how he votes.

But I digress. Let me turn, for a moment, to the amazing performance of the Labour Front Bench in response to the regulator's consultation document. My hon. Friends may have thought that today was pretty amazing, but today was not the first occasion.

The hon. Members for Oldham, West, for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) each issued a press release. Taken together, they were an embarrassment to Labour. *[Interruption.]* Let me help the hon. Members. The hon. Member for Oldham, West, on behalf of Labour, thought that the regulator's three options were all different and he picked the one that he liked. The hon. Member for Fife, Central, on behalf of Labour, condemned all three options, saying that they all

"amount to the same thing".

The hon. Member for Fife, Central, on behalf of Labour, claimed that I had been "humiliated" by the regulator. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, on behalf of Labour, said that I had hung the regulator "out to dry". The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, on behalf of Labour, said:

"I understand Mr. Swift threatened to resign . . . That is why Mawhinney backed off."

On "Newsnight" the regulator replied:

"I certainly did not threaten to resign."

The interviewer said:

"That's what Labour are saying."

and John Swift said, "Well, they are wrong". What a shambles. It is no wonder that the Labour party cannot formulate a policy; it cannot even formulate a sensible press release.

Certain facts are not in dispute. Since nationalisation, under Governments of both parties, £54 billion has been invested in the railways. Every Conservative Government since the war has increased investment in British Rail. Since 1979, the Government have invested more than £15 billion in British Rail—more than £6.5 billion in the past five years. Yet, the proportion of all travel undertaken by train has fallen dramatically. In 1953, 17 per cent. of all travel was by train. Today, it is 5 per cent. In 1953, 24 per cent. of all freight was moved by train. Today it is 5 per cent.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: Not at the moment.

To be fair to the Labour party, in speeches, the hon. Member for Oldham, West and his hon. Friends have said the same as we have. Both parties have said that they want to halt the decline and reverse it. That is common ground between us. The question that each party must answer is—

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): If the Labour party wishes to increase the use of the railways, can my right hon. Friend explain why it backed the signalmen's strike?

Dr. Mawhinney: That is a good question. I do not have a clue about the answer and I suspect that Labour Members do not know either. Each party must say how it plans to reverse that trend.

Dr. Marek: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: No, I will not.

We plan to do that by injecting into the railway industry private finance, private management skills, privately driven investment decisions and private sector sensitivity to what the customer wants. We believe that that will work.

What about the Labour party? Let me tell the House the Labour party's position as I understand it. At the Labour party conference in October the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) pledged:

"The next Labour Government will reverse the break-up and privatisation of Britain's railways."

That is fairly straightforward.

On 24 November, the hon. Member for Oldham, West—he is now taking refuge in a conversation because this is becoming too embarrassing—refused to back that pledge. All that he would say was:

"Labour remains wholly committed to a publicly owned rail system."

Dr. Marek: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: I will not give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has noticed that the Secretary of State is not giving way. The hon. Gentleman should not continue to stand up. Perhaps he will leave a decent interval before trying to intervene again.

Dr. Mawhinney: On new year's eve the Leader of the Opposition told the "Today" programme that he could not give any

"cast-iron commitments in one direction or another"

about renationalisation.

On 9 January the Leader of the Opposition said:

"I'm not going to get into a situation where I am declaring that the Labour Government is going to commit sums of money to renationalisation."

On 10 January the hon. Member for Oldham, West was twisting and turning on the "Today" programme. He said:

"If you are asking me to set out now at this moment in time exactly what we would do in the light of the state of the economy, which we do not know about, when we do not know how much of the industry and what way it has been privatised in conditions which cannot be foreseen, I cannot sensibly give that answer, but our commitment to the objective is very clear."

Whatever that is, it is not a policy.

Last Monday, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East refused to confirm that Labour was committed to renationalisation. This Monday he told the "Today" programme:

"We're going to make it a publicly owned, publicly accountable railway."

Alastair Campbell, lately of the *Daily Mirror* and *Today* and now co-ordinating Labour's public messages—he must have a headache today—told David Frost on 15 January:

"There is a commitment that there will be a publicly owned, publicly accountable railway under a Labour Government."

Dr. Marek: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Dr. Mawhinney: No, I will not.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Oldham, West said that the commitment given on Monday by his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East was merely an "option". What a shambles. The Labour party does not have a policy on through ticketing because it does not have a policy on the railways. Why the shifting? Why the twisting and turning?

I am not a cynical man—

Dr. Marek: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot just stand on the Back Benches and ask the Secretary of State to give way. It is up to any right hon. or hon. Member to decide whether to give way. Clearly, the Secretary of State does not wish to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a short debate. I am coming to the end and I want to allow time for my hon. Friends to contribute.

As I have said, I am not a cynical man, but if I were I might be inclined to think that the twisting and turning may be something to do with clause IV. I wonder whether it is possible that the Labour party may have been influenced by Vernon Hince of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. On 10 January on the "Today" programme he said that the

"Labour party is committed to fighting privatisation before it happens and we would see it being returned to public ownership under a Labour Government."

That is pretty clear. In case it was not clear enough, in *Tribune* on 13 January, Jimmy Knapp said:

"We expect a . . . Labour Government to renationalise any part of the rail network that has been sold, including Railtrack."

John Edmonds said that renationalisation was "a very popular move".

So much for the "new" Labour party. It is just the same old Labour party—full of socialism and driven by the unions.

"Working out Labour's position on rail privatisation is like catching a train.

If you miss a policy, don't worry . . . there'll be another one along in an hour or two.

Does Labour really have a clue what is going on? Because we don't.

Last week Tony Blair refused to commit himself on whether Labour would re-nationalise the railways.

Then John Prescott jumped in. Labour wanted a 'publicly owned, publicly accountable' rail system.

That kept the unions and the Left-wingers happy.

But yesterday, Mr. Prescott decided to clarify everything—and as only he can, made everything as clear as mud.

Labour wouldn't take the railways straight back into public ownership, he appeared to say.

British Rail would be allowed to challenge for franchises (which it can under the Tory plans in any case). Confused? Of course you are.

But what do you expect from a party that seems to be making it up as it goes along?"

That comes from the editorial in *The Sun* yesterday. I wish that I was half as eloquent in condemning the nonsense from the Labour party. It leaves unanswered the fundamental question that I have put to the House which is how the Labour party plans to reverse the decline of the railway industry. It takes me back to what the Leader of the Opposition said. Last Wednesday, at a remarkably candid press conference, he told us that the British people did not trust the Labour party. He said:

"1995 is the year in which Labour will finally re-establish a bond of trust with the British people".

That means that the British people do not trust them at the moment.

One of the reasons why the British people do not trust the Labour party is that the Labour party will not tell them what it has in store for them. Will it tell them what it has in store for them on education? No way. On devolution? No way. On the railways? No way. I tried to be helpful to the Leader of the Opposition by asking some questions, but it is not only me that is asking them—radio and television journalists and newspaper reporters across the country have been seeking answers, too.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a debate about through ticketing. Would it be in order for the Secretary of State to get back to the issue before the House instead of debating more general issues?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When the hon. Gentleman is invited to take the Chair, he will be in a position to judge what is in order. Apart from his point of order, I judge that the rest of the debate has been in order.

Mr. Dunn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not raise bogus points of order. A number of Members have sought to intervene and will continue to seek to catch your eye. A number of Labour Members are sponsored and controlled by trade unions but have not declared their interest. Will you please require all interventions from the hon. Members for Hampstead (Ms Jackson), for York (Mr. Bayley), for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) and for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and others, to declare their interest and the fact that they are controlled by transport and railway unions?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall take other points of order in a moment. I shall rule on one at a time. It is entirely up to hon. Members to decide when to declare their interests. It is a matter of honour for individual hon. Members.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a new point of order.

Mr. Berry: It is. Is it in order for an hon. Member to refer to the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) when that hon. Member is not present? I thought that the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) was referring to me although I represent Kingswood. I wanted to put the

[Mr. Berry]

record straight on that point and to make it clear that I and my colleagues are not controlled by the Transport and General Workers Union.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Many hon. Members of all parties want to make a positive contribution. I suggest that we get back to the substance of the debate.

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am, of course, sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers but I receive no pecuniary benefit. I object to the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) saying that I am controlled by a union. It is very objectionable and does not befit the dignity of an hon. Member. May I ask him through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to withdraw his accusation which is palpably untrue? Every hon. Member says only what he believes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already said that I believe that hon. Members behave honourably and that they are all equal in this respect. I think that we can let the matter rest there.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I was hoping that the hon. Lady wanted to intervene.

Ms Jackson: Is it in order for an hon. Member to allege that another hon. Member attempted to conceal sponsorship when the latter has not made or attempted to make an intervention?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members are entirely responsible for what they do and say. There are plenty of methods available to hon. Members to respond to any allegations that may or may not be made.

Dr. Mawhinney: I remind the House that this is an Opposition day. They picked the subject and the title and included privatisation in the motion. I am merely speaking to the amendment to Labour's motion.

Let us return to the fact that the British people do not trust the Labour party. They do not trust the Labour party because the Labour party will not tell them what it has in store for them. As I was saying, it is not only me asking the questions—television, radio and newspaper reporters are asking them, too. My goodness, even the "Today" programme has started to ask them.

I wanted to be helpful to the Leader of the Opposition so I wrote to him last Friday. I asked six simple questions and wanted six straight answers. I did not ask for warm words or for him to smile at me; I wanted six straight answers. I have not yet had a reply to my letter so I am going to give the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who is putatively in charge of Labour's policy, the opportunity to answer.

Does the hon. Gentleman intend to renationalise the railways? [Hon. Members: "Answer."] If he does plan to do so, will compensation be paid to the shareholders of Railtrack? [Hon. Members: "Answer."] Precisely how would passenger services be brought back under state control in view of the fact that legal franchises and contracts would govern the use of the railways? [Hon. Members: "Answer."] If the hon. Gentleman and his party do not plan to renationalise the railways, what changes would they make in the way that the railways are run? [Hon. Members: "Answer."] It is amazing to my hon. Friends that I still have to ask such questions, but there was no hint of an answer in the hon. Gentleman's speech.

The fifth question is how would—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman is in enough trouble without the input of his Back Bench colleagues. How would he fulfil Labour's commitment to encourage more passengers and freight onto the railways? Would he invest more in the railways and, if so, how much would the shadow Chancellor allow him?

Unlike Labour, we have a policy to reverse the decline in our railways. We are creating a modern railway. Our battle cry on behalf of passengers and businesses is, "Forward to the 21st century." Labour's battle cry on behalf of the unions is, "Forward to 1945". The Opposition do not have a policy on the railways; they have only a motion. Given the antics of their Front Bench spokesman, it is almost certainly a composite motion. I invite the House to vote against it and to do so with the disdain—

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has been on his feet for 40 minutes but just before Christmas the House approved the Jopling proposals which state that Ministers should not speak for more than 30 minutes. As the Secretary of State is not even speaking to the motion, do you think that you could advise him that it is time that he allowed Back Benchers to speak?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In answer to one of the hon. Gentleman's points, the Secretary of State's speech has been in order. Whether or not it was to the liking of hon. Members is not a matter for the Chair. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman is correct in what he said about the Jopling proposals, which have been approved for a trial period. They state clearly that Ministers and Front Bench spokesmen should be encouraged to speak for no more than about 30 minutes.

Dr. Mawhinney: On that note, I invite the House to vote for the amendment. I also invite the House to vote against the motion and to do so with the disdain that it so richly deserves.

4.58 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As I invariably do if fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in debates on the railway and the rail industry, I declare an interest as the only hon. Member to be sponsored by ASLEF, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

I well understand why the Secretary of State and Tory Members do not regard today's debate as a good idea, but I assure them that Opposition Members regard it as a very good idea—as do the 64 per cent. of the British people who totally oppose privatisation of British Rail. In the last analysis, the arguments for and against privatisation boil down to one fundamental question: will privatisation provide a better or a poorer service for those who depend on the railways?

Last week we had one of the first major announcements on the practical service implications of privatisation: the Rail Regulator's proposals on through ticketing. He came up with three proposals. The first was to allow what he called "incremental change" to the current arrangements until operators could, to use the regulator's own words,

"justify a reduction in the prescribed services at stations".

The second proposal recommended what would amount to the virtual annihilation of through ticketing by reducing from 1,300 to 294 the number of outlets providing a through-ticket service, forcing passengers in some instances to travel up to 50 miles simply to buy a ticket. The third proposal was something of a hotchpotch and involved reducing the number of origins and destinations served by through ticketing. The Secretary of State failed to explain which of the options—slashing the current service, instantly reducing the current scope of the service or gradually reducing the scope of the current service—could possibly be deemed to provide a better service for railway customers.

There was a time when Ministers were robust in defending the future of through ticketing. In Committee on the Railways Bill, the former Minister with responsibility for railways said:

"Through ticketing will be mandatory . . . Anyone who wants to run a passenger train service must ensure that through tickets are available for all journeys . . . That will be an obligation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 18 February 1993; c. 258.]

Unfortunately, that promise has proved to be as empty as our stations and trains will be if the proposals are implemented, and almost as empty as the pledge given by the current Secretary of State for Transport who said last Saturday that he would not allow the proposal to stand but then on Monday said that there was nothing that he could do and that it was all a matter for the regulator.

What I find particularly amazing about through ticketing and Ministers' responses is the way in which they appear to have been caught completely unawares by the proposals that the regulator has published. The Secretary of State initially said that they were unacceptable to him. But what, in all honesty, did he expect? It has always been in the interests of British Rail, as a single entity, to provide access to all its services at all points of the system. Now that British Rail is to be fragmented, however, what possible incentive is there for operators to retail tickets on behalf of other operators, many of whom are their direct competitors?

The Secretary of State referred to ticketing facilities for airlines. Would he seriously expect British Airways to sell tickets on behalf of Virgin or vice versa? I do not believe that I would be the only person prepared to pay good money to see the Secretary of State for Transport try to explain to Sir Colin Marshall that he is expected to sell tickets for Richard Branson; there would be an international audience wanting to watch such an attempt.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: No, I will not give way.

The present ridiculous situation has come about solely and directly because of the Government's privatisation proposals. The services provided to passengers before privatisation will be reduced or totally withdrawn after privatisation. How can that be good for the customer?

I have not given an isolated example of the effect that privatisation will have on service quality. On Second Reading of the Railways Bill, the then Secretary of State for Transport was asked by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) whether rail privatisation would improve reliability, improve infrastructure and improve rolling stock. The Secretary of State said:

"The answer to all three questions is yes".—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 158.]

Mr. Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: No.

Rail privatisation was to bring us greater reliability. The headline of a copy of a press release issued in December last year by the London Regional Passengers Committee, an independent organisation set up by statute to represent the interests of rail users, stated:

"Performance Crumbles as New Rail Structure Takes Shape". SHAPE".

It continues:

"the weaknesses of the new rail industry structure are beginning to appear, and the short-term outlook is bleak . . . Already, punctuality is falling on most commuter lines into London, and cancellation rates are up . . . The outlook for British Rail's passengers is grim indeed."

We were promised that rail privatisation would improve reliability; as the group set up by statute to monitor service quality on behalf of the public says, however, far from improving reliability, privatisation is eroding it.

The House will recall that we were also promised that rail privatisation would improve infrastructure. I have a copy of the December issue of the magazine of the Railway Development Society, "Railwatch". On the front page is an interview with Mr. John Ellis, production director of Railtrack, who states:

"We will not necessarily support every station or every route . . . We want to develop the network as far as we can but it will be on a commercial basis. We cannot and should not take into account social issues."

He added, for good measure:

"I don't see us doing much re-equipping on the branch lines."

We were promised that rail privatisation would improve infrastructure; yet Railtrack's own production manager admits that the quality of infrastructure on the branch lines will be allowed to deteriorate and the social value of the rail network will no longer be taken into account.

Finally, we were promised that rail privatisation would improve rolling stock. That is the cruellest of all the broken promises that Ministers have used to bolster this broken piece of legislation. Far from improving rolling stock, the proposals mean that for the first time in its history British Rail has no new rolling stock on its order books.

Mr. Waterson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: No, the hon. Lady will not give way.

An advertisement in last Friday's edition of *Kent Today*, placed on behalf of the ABB train manufacturing company and sponsored by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley), states:

"although British Rail has been due for some time to place a follow-on order for the next phase of Networkers, it has still failed to do so.

If the order is not received by the manufacturers, ABB Transportation Ltd in York, within the next few weeks, the factory will run out of work and close with the loss of its entire workforce.

This will mean no new trains for three years".

[Ms Jackson]

Will Ministers explain how the loss of 750 jobs, the closure of one of the country's last train manufacturing companies and no new trains for at least three years will benefit anyone, let alone provide a better service for the public?

That is the central point about this piece of privatisation: whenever the question is asked whether privatisation will lead to a better service, the answer is a resounding no, whether we are talking about fares rising by double the rate of inflation, the loss of a central timetable, the loss of inter-availability of tickets or a lower passenger service requirement. We no longer have to predict the effects of privatisation; we can already see them.

Mr. MacShane: The fundamental hostility of Ministers to the very existence of a rail service is reflected in the answers given to my parliamentary questions. Last year the Prime Minister used the rail service just once and the Secretary of State for the Environment, who should be using the rail service instead of elite, chauffeur-driven limousines, used it just five times. The President of the Board of Trade, who is supposed to be committed to British industry, used the rail service just nine times last year. The Government Front Bench have no interest in and no knowledge or practical experience of our rail service.

Ms Jackson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, which will appear in the public record. My constituents have raised that subject with me on more than one occasion, and it deserves a wider audience.

Almost without exception, the effects of privatisation are bad for the rail passenger and bad for the country as a whole.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: No, I will not give way.

The Government have no coherent strategy for improving the rail service. One has only to look at the new funding regime: the budget for British Rail and Railtrack will be cut by more than £400 million in the coming financial year, with the shortfall supposedly made up by privatisation receipts to be received sometime in the distant future. Consider what happened yesterday: the Rail Regulator made one announcement about access charges and the value of those receipts was cut by an estimated £2 billion. That sum was lost to the industry in one day because of one announcement.

Rail investment has become a privatisation lottery, with the Secretary of State for Transport the Noel Edmonds of the rail industry, constantly promising each rail manager that he will be the one to receive a Treasury windfall, when in reality the Minister is totally unable to influence events or to deliver on his promises or those of his predecessors. One can almost hear the right hon. Gentleman saying, "Don't worry, Sir Bob, it could be you".

In this environment of fragmentation rather than co-ordination, of competition rather than co-operation, and of investment on the never-never, it is no wonder that the quality of service offered to passengers is deteriorating daily—and that is why this privatisation will ultimately fail. Whatever Ministers pledge, whatever excuses they give and no matter how often they point to the privatisations of the past, at the end of the day people will judge privatisation on the basis of the service that they receive. As the fiasco over through ticketing has so graphically illustrated, privatisation can mean only one thing: a poorer rail service and a country that is the poorer for it.

5.12 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): There we have it: independence for Scotland, independence for Wales and nationalisation for British Rail—a policy so popular in uniting Her Majesty's Opposition that only 12 Labour Members are present for the debate. The Opposition constantly call for more power for the regulators, but as soon as a regulator makes a pronouncement they invite the Secretary of State to intervene, clip the regulator's wings and subdue him.

It seems to have escaped hon. Members' attention that British Rail has already been privatised. For a number of years it operated the ferries to the Isle of Wight—which were run for the sole inconvenience of the passengers. As one crunched one's way through the paper cups and fag ends, if one found a seat that was not covered with seagull poo it was probably occupied by a burly British Rail seaman. If the train arrived on time, the ferry left early; if the train was late, the ferry left before it arrived. I should also mention the wonderful British Rail sandwich available on the Isle of Wight ferry, which was so curled from staleness that when one bit into one corner the other corner poked one in the eye.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Has it escaped his attention that the Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), spoke for more than half an hour without making one solitary suggestion as to how renationalising British Rail would improve services to passengers?

Mr. Field: I will come to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) later in my speech.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) refused to do so. Does my hon. Friend think, like the rest of us, that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was contributing to the wrong debate? As he was all at sea, perhaps he should have been speaking in the fishing debate which begins at 7 pm.

Mr. Field: I will disprove some of the theories of the hon. Member for Oldham, West later.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has visited the Isle of Wight. He travelled there on the ferry, which is almost the only way to reach the Isle of Wight—as the escapees from Parkhurst discovered the other day—via one of the car ferry routes. With regard to Mr. Swift's arrangements for through ticketing, as my right hon. Friend tried to point out— though he had difficulty getting it through to Labour Members— this is a consultation document. It is clear that the Opposition do not intend to produce any policies on the subject today. According to Lord Stanley, it is the duty of Oppositions to oppose everything and to propose nothing, but I was not aware that he had also said that Opposition Members must remain silent whenever they are asked about policy.

The debate presents an ideal opportunity for me to put forward my ideas about through ticketing on behalf of the people of the Isle of Wight, knowing that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be present on the Front Bench and as attentive as ever. Mr. Swift suggests in his document that Ryde pierhead should be the through-ticketing office for the Isle of Wight, and the hon. Member for Oldham, West alluded to it in his speech. That is an extraordinary suggestion as Ryde pierhead is the most difficult of the three through-ticketing offices on the Isle of Wight to access. The other two have car parking facilities and passengers do not have to catch a train, have a long and drafty walk, or buy a ticket for their motor car and drive the length of the pier to reach those offices. Ryde is also an extraordinary choice because it is the route on which services are most subject to cancellation due to bad weather.

Whenever I am asked to advise Ministers about travel arrangements to the Isle of Wight—it happens from time to time—I find that their staff always choose the Portsmouth to Ryde route. That seems to be the preferred route because it appears in the British Rail timetable, but it is not the most convenient route. Passengers can catch a train from Waterloo, arriving in Southampton just over an hour later, and then catch the Red Jet—which was built on the Isle of Wight— to Cowes, which takes 20 minutes. Red Funnel has had a franchise for through ticketing for British Rail for years and I am sure that it will be most concerned at the prospect of losing it. At Yarmouth, car parking facilities are conveniently located outside the ticket office.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Isle of Wight rail services were initially in the first tranche of franchises that the Government intended to put out to contract—indeed, they were due to be franchised by October last year—but the Government subsequently withdrew the Isle of Wight services from that tranche. Does the hon. Gentleman welcome the Government's decision to withdraw Isle of Wight services from the franchising timetable, or does he wish that they had gone ahead in October last year?

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman is incorrect: the Government did not withdraw them. I will return to that point later in my speech. If he can contain himself, he will find that the train will eventually arrive at its destination.

At Yarmouth passengers can purchase a ticket for the half-hour ferry journey. It is one of the few services where the train arrives at the pierhead near the ferry service in Lymington. It would be extraordinary if one had to travel virtually the length of the island—from Yarmouth to Ryde pierhead—to buy a through ticket, when at present one can buy one at Yarmouth, catch a train through to Brockenhurst, which is on the main system, and on to Wales or Scotland.

I have taken quite an interest in British Rail and another extraordinary matter puzzles me. British Rail invested heavily in a computer system, which I understand is called Sportis. I travel regularly from the House to the Isle of Wight by train. If one does not have a ticket, the ticket collector comes round and uses a portable piece of equipment to issue one. It will issue a ticket to almost anywhere in the United Kingdom, but for some reason British Rail left the Isle of Wight out of the computerisation. Every night, when the ticket inspector goes off duty he downloads the information on to the British Rail mainframe and that is how the costs are analysed. Having acquired that mainframe computer and the ability to issue tickets on the train throughout the system, it seems extraordinary for anyone to suggest that through ticketing is to go. Indeed, perhaps we should shut down the ticket offices and issue tickets only on the trains.

Mention has been made of British Airways, which has a giant mainframe computer able to allocate seats and tickets all over the world.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: It may be of interest to my hon. Friend and to the House that one can book flights on Virgin Airways through British Airways by means of the computerised booking system developed by British Airways after it was privatised, so the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) is totally wrong.

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend is ahead of me. I understand that the system is called Galileo and that the Ministry of Defence has adopted the same system for its own air transport requirements because it is so successful in allocating space.

As for the hon. Member for Oldham, West misleading the House and being mistaken, one of the keynotes of his speech was that there was investor apathy for the privatisation of the railway. That was the spur which made me apply to speak in the debate.

As hon. Members will know, I have been a keen advocate of privatisation of the Isle of Wight railway, which is just 12 miles long and runs from the end of Ryde pierhead to Shanklin. When I met my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), the Minister responsible for the railways at the time, he said, "If you are going to do this, Barry, we must first assure ourselves that ministerial powers are available for the Isle of Wight railway to be sold." That took a few months. Then he said that there might be a problem with the Monopolies and Mergers Commission because we had formed a consortium on the Isle of Wight. I use the royal "we" because although I am not part of it, I was an instigator of it.

The consortium involved one of the privatised bus companies which have been so successful. We read about Opposition Members being shareholders in such ventures and we know how tremendously successful that privatisation has been. There was concern about whether the MMC might rule out the consortium and not allow it to bid for the Isle of Wight railway system, but we got MMC clearance for the bid as the consortium does not want to be the majority shareholder and is quite happy to be the minority shareholder. Tomorrow morning I shall be meeting my hon. Friend the present junior Minister to raise the matter with him.

I also met my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), when he was in charge of railways, and we had several discussions. There was a feeling that, because privatisation was on the manifesto agenda, it would happen in due course anyway, so it would be premature to do it in isolation from the rest. That was fair enough. Then I met my right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), who is something of a steam and railway buff and he was very enthusiastic about the Isle of Wight railway being privatised.

So much for the suggestion by the hon. Member for Oldham, West that there is investor apathy: on the Isle of Wight there is investor anger that we have not got on with

[Mr. Field]

it yet. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering came to the Isle of Wight and met the consortium, bringing with him one of the Rail Regulator's staff. We were all horrified to be told that it was all rather difficult and that perhaps the Isle of Wight would not take first place after all.

Another ingredient made me decide to speak today. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) also made a journey to the Isle of Wight and travelled on the railway system. I did what I always do after any hon. Member has visited the Isle of Wight, including the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). I always thank them for coming to the Isle of Wight because we need all the tourist statistics we can get. When I asked the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East how he had got on and whether people on the Isle of Wight and had made him welcome, he said that they had and that he thought that privatisation might just work for the Isle of Wight railway line.

That is what really annoys me about the politics of the House and of the nation, and it gets right up the nose of the British people. The Opposition's policy has nothing to do with whether privatisation or nationalisation is right or wrong: it is about the Labour party's own agenda and delivering clause IV, and I can prove it. If the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East were the chairman of British Rail and we gave him half a billion pounds to improve the rail structure, I can say with certainty that he would not begin by expanding the railway system on the Isle of Wight. If my right hon. Friend were to make me the chairman of British Rail and gave me half a billion pounds to expand the system, I would not begin by expanding the railway system on the Isle of Wight either, and nor would my right hon. Friend. Certainly British Rail will never expand the system on the Isle of Wight.

We have ideology for its own sake and we cannot get the project through even though a consortium of local business people and hoteliers believes that we can expand the system on the island. The Liberal Democrat county council is also in favour of expanding the railway system on the Isle of Wight, although it pretends not to be and the Liberal Democrat spokesman will be speaking against it today. To give the Liberal Democrats their due, however, they have backed the project fully and are as disappointed as I am that it has been delayed.

It is a remarkable situation: I want to privatise British Rail on the Isle of Wight, and so do the Liberal Democrats, the people on the Isle of Wight, the consortium and the Ministers. Only Mr. Swift clearly does not want to privatise the railway line on the Isle of Wight. The other day he announced that the legal bill for doing so would be much too big and that it would have to be put on the back burner.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman kindly answered my question by saying that he is disappointed that privatisation on the Isle of Wight has been deferred. The original proposal involved what was termed a vertical privatisation whereby the private owner would own the infrastructure of the track and run the services. Is the hon. Gentleman advocating that as a pattern for privatisation in England, Scotland and Wales? If so, will he explain why? If not, why does he feel that that should be the case on the Isle of Wight, if he still believes it to be the case?

Mr. Field: I am glad of the opportunity to ask the hon. Gentleman why his party's manifesto does not include devolution for the Isle of Wight. As I often tell my constituents when they talk about problems in England, I am responsible only to the Isle of Wight, whose electorate sent me here, and I hope that I do a reasonable job in representing them.

Dr. Mawhinney: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's commitment to his constituents. He is saying, in effect, that the private sector's enthusiasm and commitment to passengers will be so great that it will not need to be told that ways must be found to make it easy for people to buy tickets. The private sector understands that that is an essential part of its success. As regards the consultation document, I hope that my hon. Friend and his constituents will make their views clearly known to the Rail Regulator as this is the first time in British Rail's history that they have an opportunity to help shape our future railways.

Mr. Field: My right hon. Friend knows me well enough to assume that Mr. Swift will receive robust letters on that point from me and from more than a few of my constituents.

When an industry, business or other undertaking is in the hands of the state, the customer is seen as the enemy—a bit of an inconvenience. When such concerns are privatised, however, customers are seen as an opportunity and as friends. That is precisely what has happened with privatisations thus far. When British Rail ran ferries, we saw staff with glum faces and scruffily turned out, scruffy ships and all the problems to which I alluded earlier. Everything was done for the sole inconvenience of the customer. Today, the same employees who once worked for a nationalised industry are smart in appearance, proud, know who they work for and, above all, know that the customer is king.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kettering was 100 per cent. behind the Isle of Wight consortium to which I referred. The other day, he telephoned me with remarkably good news from the Ministry of Defence. He said that the Government were ordering 24 of the C130J Hercules aircraft, which is good news for Westland Aerospace. When I asked my right hon. Friend whether they would be operational from the moment they were delivered, there was a long pause. Then he said, "Yes, they will—why do you ask?" I replied, "Because I would like their first task to be to bomb the office of the Rail Regulator so that we can get some action by him as soon as possible."

5.32 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I shall not take a journey around the Isle of Wight because I want to return to the subject of the debate. That has nothing to do with the fact that, when I visited the island recently, I was not welcomed by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), even though I took full advantage of its transport facilities.

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State has left the Chamber, but I shall pay the same attention as he did to the detail of statements. He made much fun of statements taken out of context, but I shall quote a statement precisely in

context. It was made to my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) after hon. Members in the House and in Committee, from all parties, pressed for information about what guarantee the Government would give on the continuation of through ticketing. The right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), then Minister for Public Transport, said:

"Through ticketing will be mandatory through the licensing system. Anyone who wants to run a passenger train service must ensure that through tickets are available for all journeys . . . That will be an obligation."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 18 February 1993; c. 258.]

According to members of the Government Front Bench, that statement can now be interpreted as meaning that anyone who wants to run a passenger train service could provide only one outlet offering through ticketing—for example, the west of England could be covered by just Port Talbot station and, if the Secretary of State is right, the obligation would be met. That is patent nonsense. Even if that is the way that the Secretary of State intends to interpret the assurance given by the right hon. Member for Kettering, the House will not tolerate an attempt to undermine an assurance which, no doubt, was made with all honesty and integrity.

The Minister said also that there was a statutory obligation to take account of the Secretary of State's guidance. If we cannot be told what the guidance is, what is the statutory obligation? Promises and performance do not tally.

We are confronted with the extraordinary core list. The Minister said that it was only one of three options. It is curious that the core option is spelt out in so much detail but that the two others represent a diminution of the present position. The regulator's document makes a token examination of the two other options, and nothing that the Secretary of State said this afternoon has changed the rationale behind the document.

There is madness afoot, in the way that the regulator is approaching the planning of our rail network. Towns as large as Yeovil and Peterborough seem to be denied through ticketing. The right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) may care to explain why his town has been overlooked.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I do not want to allow the hon. Gentleman to go too far down a dead end. There was a transcription error in the document, whereby parts of Edinburgh were included twice and Peterborough was omitted. It was never the regulator's intention not to include Peterborough.

Mr. Tyler: The Minister took the words out of my mouth. There was an oversight. The document was issued without Peterborough being included, which is precisely my point. Such sloppy thinking has gone into—

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Was it within your hearing that the words used by my hon. Friend the Minister were "a transcription error"? Has that not been translated by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) into "an oversight"? Are not the meanings quite different?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): My hearing is exceptionally good and the hon. Gentleman is correct—but it is not for me to judge how any hon. Member interprets words used on either side of the Chamber.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. My point is that, if the transcription was a mistake, why was it overlooked? I hope that the right hon. Member for Peterborough will explain to his constituents why such an important railway station came to be overlooked.

Dr. Marek: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I shall not give way again; I must make progress.

I suspect that the Peterborough question—or the Yeovil question, if the House prefers—will come to haunt the Secretary of State, as the West Lothian question has come to haunt the Leader of the Opposition.

Other areas of the country will not have the benefit of through ticketing. Newbury, serving a large area of Berkshire, will be without it, as will Lichfield, Stowmarket and Liskeard. The whole of south-east Cornwall will be without even one core station. People in that area will have to cross the national boundary into England, to Plymouth, to obtain through tickets. That will not only cause inconvenience but mean additional costs. If people have to take one single ticket journey after another, it is quite possible that there will be an increase of about 20 per cent. in the cost of their journey.

Mr. Nigel Evans *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: No, I want to make progress.

The rationale for this proposal—if that is not too flattering a word—is that the Government want all the train operators, of which there will be dozens after privatisation, to be able to issue their own tickets. Unfortunately, however, the Minister does not seem to have realised that the combinations that result from that are so complex, with so many different tickets, that only a few highly trained squads of crack ticket task forces will be able to understand what on earth is going on, hence the proposal for core stations.

Of course, ticket chaos is already rife. I am advised that there are now no fewer than 17 different return tickets for journeys between London and Birmingham alone, and the difficulty of getting information out of stations at either end is already considerable. The Minister says that this is all done to encourage diversity and choice, but diversity is a sham when no one can explain what is on offer, and choice means chaos when the consumer cannot weigh up the options.

As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight mentioned, there is a system that allows those who cannot get a ticket at an unmanned station to obtain one for most destinations from a portable computerised ticket machine. For instance, on the Newquay to Par branch line, people can obtain through tickets to almost anywhere—as long as the British Rail network is still in existence. What we have not heard from the Secretary of State today is whether it is intended that that system should be taken apart or made obsolete or whether some new system of portable through ticketing should be made available in its place. It is

[Mr. Tyler]

because such a system fills in the gaps in the network at present that those who start their journeys from one of the unmanned stations can obtain a reasonable service en route.

We should surely be demanding an expansion and improvement of the ticketing system. After all, the technology is in place already; I understand that any station with a telephone line can provide this service. We should, therefore, not tolerate any retreat to a second-class service.

There is a sinister undercurrent to all this. The debacle is symptomatic of the Government's attitude towards privatisation in general; it is a portent of things getting worse. If through ticketing is for the chop, what are we to make of ministerial assurances about integrated timetables which we were given at the same time? My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has already referred to the difficulties of obtaining timetables. In many places, passengers will have to cross-reference between piles of pamphlets. What we need is a national passenger information service, providing seamless journeys, through ticketing and through timetable information.

What are we to make of the promises we were given at the same time about through train services? Horror stories are already surfacing about the difficulties that have become apparent even before the franchisees come on the scene. Operators will become so desperate to meet their punctuality targets that they are likely to decide that connections are of less importance. The logical conclusion is that, if operators ran no trains at all, they would be able to guarantee 100 per cent. punctuality.

It takes no genius to see that the upshot of all this is that even more people will desert the railways for their long-distance journeys. At present, a number of important holiday resorts in Devon and Cornwall benefit from Saga Holidays' use of through trains, with through ticketing and through services—not to mention the through timetables which are of critical importance to Saga's elderly holidaymakers, who routinely travel by train from the north of England to most of the major resorts in the south-west. In future, Saga says, they will go by coach. That will lessen the chances of maintaining a viable rail service and will put more pressure on the roads.

The conclusion to be drawn from all this muddle is that the Government want a minimalist, slimmed-down railway which will not pose a challenge to the great car economy which they used to champion. No doubt, the Minister will say that he is building a railway fit for the 21st century, or some such platitude. He came close to using one again this afternoon. More probably, he is building a railway fit for the scrap heap.

The motion is drawn in strictly limited terms, but the Government amendment opens up the whole privatisation can of worms. No doubt that is why a number of Conservative Members seemed to be shaking in their shoes. Perhaps they have been listening to their constituents on the subject of the unpopularity of this "privatisation too far" or, as *The Daily Telegraph* calls it, this "poll tax on wheels". I have good news for them. For the reasons that I set out in Monday's debate, I believe that the privatisation of Railtrack before polling day now looks increasingly unlikely, so Tory Members may be spared the experience of going to the electorate with Railtrack already in the private sector.

I believe, too, that the alleged attractions of the franchises are proving far from convincing, which is why so few bids are in. For our part, we have said—I said it on Monday—that we shall use our influence to retain or reclaim a golden share in Railtrack, to ensure that the network remains a public service. The Secretary of State quoted my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). I agree entirely with what my right hon. Friend said. We have repeatedly made it clear that we have no objections to introducing an element of competition—to the Isle of Wight or to any area where that would be appropriate but within a national railway network and only if there is a framework of guaranteed public service obligations, together with a national long-term transport plan.

Next week, we shall be able to take stock again, because we expect then to have the announcement by the Office of the Passenger Rail Franchising Director on minimum service specifications. If that announcement is in line with the sort of thinking exhibited by the Secretary of State this afternoon, and by last week's report from the regulator, we shall have further confirmation of the fact that standards are to be drastically lowered. Even the limited requirement that last year's timetable should form the base point for improved services in future will be torn up.

Perhaps all this does not bother Ministers. We know that the Prime Minister does not use trains—I understand that he has been on one only once since becoming Prime Minister—but the travelling public cannot afford to be so optimistic. This plan for rail privatisation is a one-way ticket to disaster. It is time someone pulled the emergency cord and stopped the train.

5.46 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): In view of the limited time available, I propose to keep my remarks short so as to be fair to other hon. Members who wish to speak.

Regrettably, far too much time was wasted earlier in the debate. When I saw the Opposition motion on today's Order Paper, it struck me that this was a debate of National Union of Students standard—it was all about playschool politics. It gives me no pleasure to say that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) came into the Chamber today with few notes and very little of substance to say.

One of the benefits of a national railway network is through ticketing. Parliament has expressly required the regulator to promote through ticketing as a network benefit, now and in future. That is why the Opposition motion is so silly. I feel that the hon. Member for Oldham, West could have done a great deal better. He did not even answer any of the points put to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We heard only the usual mishmash, "One day we will renationalise; the next day we won't." I feel sorry for the hon. Gentleman, because all too often in recent days I have heard remarks on the subject of transport made by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who is no longer an Opposition transport spokesman but who appears to give advice to the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), also no longer an Opposition

transport spokesman, appears to have taken the lead in these matters, and Alastair Campbell seems to be telling Opposition Members what they should be saying.

The Transport Select Committee quite rightly took a critical but constructive look at the Government's proposals, and the Government listened and acted on virtually all its suggestions. I was struck by how many British Rail employees privately told members of the Committee that they, acting as individuals or collectively, could provide a better service for the travelling public.

In this debate, as in similar debates over the past couple of years, we have heard far too little from Opposition Members about the necessity of improvements for the travelling public. That is what the Government's proposals are about. It is all very well for the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) to say that he and his party agree with increased competition, when he wants British Rail to remain lock, stock and barrel in the public sector. There must be change if some of the improvements that the Government want are to come to fruition.

Mr. Tyler: If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard* tomorrow, he will find that what he suggests is not what I said. The commitment that I gave this evening and on Monday was specific. I hope that he will do me the honour of at least reading what I had to say in *Hansard*.

Mr. Banks: If I am wrong, I shall, of course, apologise. I know from personal experience, however, that the hon. Gentleman is not different from his Liberal Democrat colleagues: he says one thing in this place, one thing in his constituency, one thing at one end of his constituency and another thing at the other end of it.

Those of us who want to improve the quality of service to the travelling public back the Government's rail privatisation proposals. We should give those individuals who have said privately that they could do better individually or collectively the chance to do so through the franchising mechanism that the Government are putting in place to give a better deal to the travelling public. We must make rail travel more attractive and, above all, attract more people on to the railways and off the roads.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West talked about the number of through stations where we can buy a through ticket. Even though only half the stations in the United Kingdom are staffed, there are wide discrepancies between the sort of tickets that we can buy from different British Rail operators and from different stations. It is necessary to book in advance for many tickets to obtain them at a competitive price. It is necessary also to book a seat. Booking is necessary for a variety of other reasons, all of which are positive and are designed to improve the service that is available to the travelling public. I am not concerned at the fact that many tickets and fares are available.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) talked about the airlines. A person who wants to use one route from one destination to another will find that a wide range of fares is available. That choice is important. All too often, we hear, especially from trade union sponsored Labour Members—particularly those sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—about what is important to the union interest. Insufficient consideration is given to the travelling public.

Ticketing in the current British Rail set up has not been the result of statutory regulation or legal obligation; instead, it has been brought about by the commercial wisdom and know-how of those within British Rail. That is exactly what will happen within the new privatised franchises. Those who run the franchises will have a vested interest in encouraging as many people as possible to use their services.

The introduction of new ideas and privatisation will increase choice. That has happened in and between the airlines and it will happen within the railways. British Airways is not, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in quoting an Opposition spokesman, the pantomime horse of capitalism; instead, it has been a rip-roaring success. When the travelling public recognise the benefits of franchising in years to come, they will not see renationalisation as something on the menu that they might wish to choose. They will not take that view when they have experienced the substantial improvements that franchising will bring about.

As I have said, British Rail has no current statutory minimum service for ticketing. That is the point behind the regulator's consultation document. The hon. Member for Oldham, West said that there are just one or two paragraphs in the report on the existing system and a great deal on core and secondary services. It is not necessary to write many paragraphs on the present system, because everybody knows about it. We want maximum opportunities for passengers to buy through tickets to continue. The best solution to emerge from the debate would be new standards in the provision of service, with independent decision making by operators and standards prescribed and enforced by the regulator.

The current arrangements must form the starting point. For a period, the regulator should approve all changes within certain criteria. After a given time, operators such as British Rail should be able to exercise more and more of their own commercial judgment when introducing new ideas and innovation to improve the service that they provide. In short, changes must be gradual and incremental. I have no doubt that that is exactly what will happen.

We have not heard Opposition Members, and especially those on the Opposition Front Bench, set out their ideas on how they would improve the service. I have referred before to the fuddle and muddle of Opposition statements. Indeed, a press officer for the Leader of the Opposition has contradicted Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. It is sad to look across the Chamber and recognise that if ever there were a Labour Government, probably not one of the present Opposition Front-Bench team—well, possibly one for the sake of continuity—would end up as a Minister in the Department of Transport.

At one stage, the Leader of the Opposition is back-pedalling on renationalisation; the next minute, he is saying, "Yes, we need to follow that route." Where is he? I gather that he is travelling the country trying to drum up support for getting rid of clause IV. Why is there fuddle and muddle on the Opposition Front Bench? The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and other union influence have ensured that the Leader of the Labour party knows that he will not be able to ditch clause IV if he does not stick to his guns on renationalising British Rail.

[Mr. Banks]

What a way to carry on. What a contradiction. That is not the way forward. The public will not be fooled now or at the ballot box come the next general election by such nonsensical thinking by Opposition Members.

If the Labour party were to win the next general election, the union barons who are their pay masters would come out of the woodwork, as they are beginning to do now. I have no doubt that the interests of the unions would be put before the interests of the travelling public. It is the interests of the travelling public that have made me so supportive of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench. The Government amendment contains the most sensible balance to be found in the Order Paper and I shall have no hesitation in supporting the Government.

5.59 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): We heard much invective from the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), but little sound advice of which the House could take notice. I can advise the hon. Gentleman that the next Labour Government—yes, the Labour party will win the next general election and there will be a Labour Government—will take the railways back under public control and ownership. The quicker that that is done, the better. We shall do so for good reasons, one of them being that we want an integrated transport system.

In the area that I represent, rail connections with Chester have already been broken. Regional Railways prefers travellers from Wrexham who are making a journey to the capital or to the midlands to use sprinters, using Regional Railways stock. It discourages them from going to Chester—to go up the Trent valley using InterCity stock. The Government have no answer to that. There are no longer any decent connections at Chester for travellers from Wrexham to other places in the United Kingdom. That is something that privatisation cannot solve. I predict that the disintegration of the service will become greater.

Liberals are sometimes their own worst enemies. I thought that I would be helpful to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) about the contents of the consultation paper. I was on the Minister's side when it came to interventions. The hon. Gentleman did not even allow me to intervene in his speech. I wanted to tell him that Wrexham does not appear in the paper.

Why is Wrexham not in the document? It is a borough of 115,000 people. One criterion that appears in the consultation paper is to be found on page 29, where it is stated that all towns and cities with a population of more than 50,000 will have at least one core station. There are four stations within the borough of Wrexham. Two are in the centre, where there is a population of well over 50,000. As I said, Wrexham does not appear in the consultation document.

There are plenty of things wrong with the consultation paper, but let me take it a little further. One little secret has been kept from the public and from the House in the debate so far. It is simplified by reading page 1, the regulator's foreword. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, 21 pages deal with cutting the number of stations in the British Isles where one can buy through tickets. That cannot possibly be an improvement in services. I know that Conservative Members have been standing on their heads trying to pretend that such consultation papers are improvements in services, but they are not. The regulator says, in the first line:

"One of my duties under the Railways Act is to promote the use of the railway network."

The regulator talks about customers, about service, about better railways. That is one of his duties. Does he tell us another of his duties? It is in section 4 of the Railways Act—to promote economy in the British railway network. That has not been mentioned. The Secretary of State did not mention economy. Perish the thought that that word should cross his lips. What it is about is an economic sanction being applied, and, of course, the British railway traveller will pay for the Government's decision to privatise the railways, if it ever comes about.

I accept that the Minister said that through ticketing will be available, give or take a few stations, in more or less the same stations as we have at present. But the problem is a little deeper. I hope that the Minister is listening, because I would appreciate a reply if one can be given, although in some instances the absence of a reply is rather telling. Will through ticketing be available at the best prices for the day of travel? I can see grave difficulties and that, I suspect, is why we are debating the matter.

This is not infantile, as Conservative Members have sought to make out. I know all about Conservative briefings and I am willing to bet that the words "infantile" or "petty" have appeared in the briefing that is handed out in the Whips Office to all the hon. Members who are dragged in to make their speeches. By and large they never use the railways, or very rarely. They are dragged into the Chamber on pain of not getting any further promotion, or whatever.

If through ticketing is to remain—this is a serious question—will any person going to a station to get a through ticket be able to get one at the best possible price on the day of travel? It would be easier, perhaps, to promise that if one was buying the ticket two or three weeks in advance, but what if one wanted to travel that day or the next? It is possible that one might pay standard class fares when there may be offers from another station, and if one booked a ticket to that station and rebooked, one might pay a cheaper price. That is something that the Government will have to face up to if this mad scheme ever comes about. I do not think that it will, because there is another problem.

There are literally tens of thousands of ways in which to book tickets, and if there are to be different operating companies, they will have different offers at different times and on different days. Some companies might have cheaper tickets after 4 o'clock, some after 7 o'clock. I do not believe that British Rail or the Rail Regulator, at this stage, has the ability through the computer system to get everything right.

British Rail's system is called Tribute. As far as I understand it, British Rail says that everything is going smoothly at the moment, but I do not believe that it has the ability to cope at this stage. The comparison with airlines is wrong, because airline ticketing is much easier. It is true that there are different fares, but the destinations by and large are the same or grouped for the same fare.

The rules are much easier. The rules for rail through ticketing will be very complicated, and I suspect that that is why the Government are in trouble.

Mr. Matthew Banks: The hon. Gentleman referred to airlines. Why should the system that may operate when franchising takes place, with a variety of different fares available at different times, from different locations and ticketed in a variety of ways, be any less a means of providing choice and value for money to the travelling public using the railways than the airline industry?

Dr. Marek: My contention is that the system on the railway is much more complicated and is liable to vary in a much more complicated way and with much greater frequency. I do not believe that the Government can do it.

I should be grateful if the Minister gave the assurance when he replies that through ticketing will continue at the best available price. Let us remember that many people go to ticket offices. I know that a business traveller with a credit card can go to a travel agent or whatever and get his ticket whenever he likes two or three days in advance, but most of my constituents turn up at the railway station. They have either a £10 or a £20 note. They do not quite know where or when they are going. They do not know the fare structure, but they want to buy a ticket there and then and be off. It would be a disgrace if passengers were inconvenienced by withdrawal of through-ticketing facilities.

Let me draw to the attention of the House a previous debate that we had. As a member of the Committee that considered the Railways Bill, I should perhaps repeat that I am sponsored by the RMT, although I have said it once before. I do not want anybody to be under any misapprehension. On 16 February 1993, I tabled an amendment to what was then clause 4 of the Bill, making it the priority of the Rail Regulator to promote the railway network and to give it precedence over economies and efficiencies in the railway network. That was not acceptable to the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman). He said:

"I recommend the Committee to reject the amendment. All the duties are important. I concede that the first two are extremely important."—

that is, promoting the railway system. He said that the third duty was to provide for economies on the railway system, and continued:

"I recommend the hon. Member for Wrexham not to attempt to put the regulator in a straitjacket. We have set out his duties clearly in the Bill. They are comprehensive and sensible. Let us not attempt to prioritise them. We must let the regulator make his own decision."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B,* 16 February 1993; c. 136.]

If one wanted to make a right old mess of anything, the Government did just that. They did it in Committee and are now paying the penalty. One of the reasons why they do not like this debate is that the average passenger, the average citizen, who will vote in a general election in the next two years, understands very well what the debate is about. It is not about airy-fairy economics, monetary supply, or relations with Cambodia or anywhere else. It is about being able to travel on a train when one wants to, to understand the system and not have to pay too much for it and to have the convenience of getting a ticket when one wants it. The public understand that. Unfortunately, Conservative Members do not.

6.9 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I welcome this opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate, which has already had some distinguished contributions by Conservative Members. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) on managing the keep within the time limit that he set himself. He dealt with matters in some detail and gave the House an idea of some of the pressures that Opposition Front-Bench Members will have to face from their Back Benchers in favour of nationalisation. That came out quite clearly in his speech.

I wish to raise an important matter that is of great interest to my constituents. Although I welcome the opportunity to raise it, my first reaction when I saw the Opposition motion was one of some surprise. Although railway through ticketing is an important subject, it is surprising that the Opposition chose it for debate when there are so many other important issues before the House at the moment, and when the Opposition have chosen this time to launch important debates on matters such as devolution, which, incidentally, may enter into this debate.

If the Opposition were to have their way and set in train a course of events that broke up the United Kingdom, we might be unable to procure through tickets to Scotland. We would arrive at the Scottish border, pay a border tax to go into Scotland and then be unable to purchase a ticket for the return journey because the trains would be full of Scots people trying to escape from the high taxation being imposed on them by an Edinburgh assembly.

That is not the only reason why this seems a strange debate. We are debating a consultation document. It is strange for the Opposition to use their time to debate a document that is about the best way of achieving certain ends on which the Government have given firm commitments and which, as my right hon. Friend has said, the Government have a statutory duty to procure.

The fact that we are considering a consultation document places certain limits on the debate. It makes it impossible to do as the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) did and call upon the Minister to give a cast-iron guarantee that the operation will be carried out in a particularly detailed way. It is impossible for the Minister to give such a guarantee when the consultation document is about the best way forward. I would not for a moment accuse the hon. Gentleman of deliberately asking the Minister for a guarantee on something on which it is impossible for the Minister to give a guarantee. It is probably an oversight on his part, if I may put it that way.

Mr. Tyler: It was precisely because Ministers gave those assurances, which Conservative and Opposition Members took to be guarantees, that this debate is taking place.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman illustrates the distinction that I made between guarantees given by the Minister and matters of detail concerning the way in which those guarantees will be fulfilled. That is what the hon. Gentleman was referring to and that is what the consultation document is all about.

I rest upon the criterion by which the proposal will be judged, which is contained in the consultation document. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that there was nothing in the consultation document about

[Mr. Clappison]

having a better railway service at the end of the day. But if he had got as far as page 2, he would have found in paragraph 4 that the regulator had set himself the following criterion:

"I want to be satisfied that there will be a better rail network and better use of the network by reason of the decisions I take."

One can dispose of the debate on through ticketing by urging my right hon. Friend the Minister to judge the consultation by that criterion. To be fair, my right hon. Friend gave every sign that that was just the criterion that he would apply.

That brings me to an important point that has been missed by some Opposition Members, which is the nature of privatisation itself. Like other Conservative Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), who spoke so forcefully on the subject, I look forward to privatisation delivering benefits to railway users across a wide range of railway services. I see no reason to doubt that they will bring the same entrepreneurial spirit, the same innovation and the same skills as have been brought to so many other privatisations.

During the debate, we have heard all the scare stories that we have heard about privatisations in the past. But the important point, which Opposition Members must regard in a responsible way, is that it is vital for passengers that this privatisation is a success. The process is in train and its success is important if a good service is to be provided. We shall be letting down our constituents if, in our actions or words, we do anything to undermine the success of the venture.

We have heard much today about what has been said during the past week by Opposition Members on the subject. I do not want to go over the glaring differences that have already been amply exposed, but it is impossible to leave things as they stand. There is a glaring difference between Opposition Members as to whether they want the privatisation to succeed.

Yesterday we heard the news that the regulator was reducing by 8 per cent. the rents to be paid by privatised train companies. Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen could not make up their minds whether that was a good thing. In *The Daily Telegraph* today, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) is quoted as saying that the rent cut would make Railtrack less attractive to the private sector. He was therefore criticising the Government for making the privatisation unattractive to potential operators.

At the same time, the hon. Member for Oldham, West is quoted in the same edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, somewhat ironically juxtaposed on the same page, as saying that pulling the privatised companies back into the public sector remained an option. The report went on to say:

"In a sparsely veiled warning, he said: 'We are going to draw the attention of investors to the risk involved in that they will be dependent on continuing levels of high public subsidy.'"

Spelling out such a warning is damaging to the process of privatisation and getting good management on to the railway. It is also damaging to the interests of railway users.

I hope that the hon. Member for Fife, Central will deal with the question of ownership when he replies. The present state of play came from the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) yesterday. He is quoted in *The Guardian* yesterday as saying:

"We will allow those contracts"—

which are to be allocated under the privatisation programme—

"to continue and when they are up we want a publicly owned and publicly accountable railway."

One must take into account the fact that those contracts will last for seven years. How does that leave railway users and franchise operators during that seven years? It is more serious than the Labour party simply having a seven-year itch for a bit of nationalisation. It affects the railway's future during those seven years. How can franchise operators operate a franchise for seven years knowing that at the end of that time their franchises will come to an end and the system will be taken into public ownership? That is a recipe for chaos and confusion in our railway system for the next seven years.

No one would award a franchise under such circumstances. No one would take up a franchise with any confidence if there was a threat of renationalisation after seven years. The hon. Member for Fife, Central shakes his head. I should be grateful if he clarified what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said and said whether that is Labour party policy. I shall willingly give way to him if he wishes to do so. He remains in his seat. I hope that he will specifically say whether the Labour party has a definite commitment to renationalise the railways after seven years. Such a policy would be a recipe for chaos and confusion over seven years for railway users—for my constituents who depend on the railway service.

During the next seven years and beyond, I look forward to a railway service under private ownership having all the benefits of other privatised industries. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to proceed with that course.

6.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) is worried about a seven-year backing for franchisers, but it is a pity that he has not been worried about backing for a railway system which has meant that the United Kingdom has the lowest level of investment in rail infrastructure in Europe. It would be more appropriate if he turned his attention to that.

This is a highly specific debate, but it affects all rail users and so is of great concern to the general public. Although the Government are trying to dismiss it as being trivial, it is anything but trivial to people who have to use rail transport and to people who wish to see a properly funded and operating rail transport system.

The Government gave clear promises regarding through ticketing, but it is not clear whether they can or will deliver those promises. The public have had a comprehensive, country-wide integrated rail system, but they now see that that system is in danger of fragmentation as it goes through a Government experiment. No one can judge the outcome of that, but many of us are extremely worried by what we have seen in the early stages of the Government's plans. The rail

system needs investment and modernisation, but the Government are delivering simply a strong dose of ideology.

The debate is about the practical consequences of the Government's policy and philosophy. Their privatisation scheme is creating a fragmentation of rail service provision and control whose consequences are just beginning to become apparent. From a unified, easily identifiable network is emerging a shattered, stuttering, incomplete system. The Government should not be surprised by the reaction to their plans, which could mean that only one railway station in eight will sell a complete range of tickets. Currently, 1,580 stations sell through tickets.

The public watchdog, the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee, has observed:

"Making people travel 50 miles on a 2 hour round trip to buy a ticket and then clutch a pack of cards to go by train is quite bizarre."

The committee is entirely correct.

It is feared that only one in eight of Britain's 2,500 railway stations will sell a range of tickets enabling passengers to travel anywhere in the area controlled by what may soon be 25 franchisees in the new divided rail system. Of the three options given by the regulator, only that one is described in detail; no such space is accorded to the alternative—a considerable increase in the number of stations selling tickets.

Indeed, privatisation seems designed to make rail travel more difficult and expensive. The administrative costs of preparation, including legal and City fees, have been estimated at over £700 million. Surely it would be far better to invest such a large sum in services than to waste it by implementing an experiment intended to fulfil the Government's narrow-minded ideology, against the wishes of the general public.

Railtrack will be required to earn a much higher return on capital, and the higher fees to franchise holders will be passed on in higher passenger costs. I have heard nothing from the Government to dispel that worry. An estimated 90 per cent. of their income will have been pre-empted by access charges to Railtrack and fees to the rolling stock leasing companies. There is a real danger that services will have to be cut drastically so that they can generate the profits that shareholders have now come to expect. That must lead to fewer passengers and higher fares. The Government should heed that warning, because it came from the House's own Transport Select Committee, but so far I have seen no sign that they are listening to the views of a Committee that contained many of their own Back Benchers.

The debate is, in itself, a warning of forthcoming unattractions: unmanned stations, fewer ticket outlets and fewer services at stations. That adds up to a fall in service standards that the Government are describing as an improvement, which strikes me as monumental cheek. Gaps are opening up between the Secretary of State for Transport and the regulator—as we have heard today—between the public and their rail service provision, between different sections of the rail industry and between different types of provision; all that is a consequence of Government policy.

Let me ask a question that the Secretary of State ducked earlier. How will he use his powers of guidance vis-a-vis the rail regulator? Will guidance on through ticketing become an instruction? That question is at the heart of the debate. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that, under his own legislation, the Secretary of State cannot interfere with the regulator's independence. What exactly is the relationship between the publicly elected Secretary of State and the unelected, unaccountable regulator? Who will make the final decision?

The relationship between the Government and the regulator is at the heart of the debate. Under the Railways Act 1993, the regulator takes "direction" from the Secretary of State until the end of next year; but the regulator will determine the size of the network because he is the final decision maker on line closures—and for that he is paid £125,000 a year and is given 50 members of staff. No wonder the public are fed up, and worried about yet another growth in quangos—bodies that are unelected and unaccountable, and are making decisions that affect all our daily lives.

The Government cannot escape the fact that they made clear promises on through ticketing. We are entitled to ask why they did not include guarantees on present levels of through ticketing as part of any franchising deal. The Secretary of State said today, clearly and unequivocally, that through ticketing would be maintained; but how does he know, and who will decide? Ministerial bluster will not hide the threadbare nature of past promises and the present failure to deliver.

The Secretary of State was very good at asking questions of the Opposition Front Bench, but managed to avoid answering questions about through ticketing. Will he make the final decision? Will he, the elected Minister, decide whether through ticketing is to be maintained at present levels, or will that be decided by an unelected, unaccountable regulator? I regret to say that, in this age of quangos, the answer lies in the right hon. Gentleman's avoidance of that key question: it speaks volumes.

Power is being taken from the people, against whose wishes these privatisation measures are being imposed. Apparently, a direct Government promise is now in the hands of an unelected regulator acting through an unelected, unaccountable quango. That is what the Government have brought us to, and they will take the full blame at the next general election.

6.25 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. Opposition Members have said that Conservative Members are unhappy that the debate is taking place, but that is nothing to do with what they have said. The whole debate is facile: all the arguments have been rehearsed in the Chamber before, during debates on the original question of privatising the railways.

I am as confused now as I was before about the Opposition's policy on the railways, and I do not think that they know exactly what it is either. I will not take any lectures from Opposition Members who have now started to bleat about their concern for people who use the railways, given that theirs was the party that supported a signalmen's strike that brought misery and discomfort to many millions of passengers throughout a dreadful period; I do not think that they can give us any lectures about the care and service that we want customers of the railways to receive in future.

It is the same old story of scaremongering. Opposition Members are trying to scare passengers into thinking that they will be given a worse service after privatisation. We

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

heard the same arguments in regard to all the earlier privatisations. In an excellent article, today's *Daily Express* talks of "Power to the people", referring to several of the privatisations that Opposition Members opposed. It mentions British Airways, for instance. I do not know whether any Opposition Members will stand up and say, "If we win the next general election, we will nationalise British Airways again", but I do not think that very likely. As a nationalised company, British Airways was losing taxpayers' money hand over fist, but profits for the last six months are expected to be around £450 million. It is the world's favourite airline. We want to ensure that ours is the world's favourite railway system—and we can do it, with the same efficiency savings that have been brought to bear on British Airways.

British Telecommunications is another example. Opposition Members put out their scaremongering stories about what would happen, saying that there would be fewer telephone boxes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is about railway privatisation and through ticketing; we do not want to hear a whole lot of questions about other privatisations.

Mr. Evans: I will move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was trying to draw a parallel, and to show the difference between what Opposition Members are saying now and the reality following privatisation, but I shall return to the subject of railways and through ticketing.

I wonder whether any Opposition Members have bothered to read the regulator's report. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said that he was not sure whether the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) had got as far as page 2; I have grave concerns about whether he even reached page 1. Paragraph 3 states:

"Privatisation and restructuring of the railways are intended to improve services to customers and stimulate innovation. In looking at any new proposals to replace British Rail's current arrangements I shall want to be satisfied that they are likely to achieve these objectives."

The first sentence of a press notice issued by the regulator on Wednesday 11 January, which I am sure Opposition Members have seen, states:

"The rail regulator, John Swift . . . today invited views on the future arrangements for the retailing of through and other tickets at stations in the restructured railway industry . . .

There are a number of options canvassed in this consultation paper. They range from enforcing the status quo to a radical change in concept, the core station and the core services."

It should be fairly clear to everyone that this is a consultation paper and that Opposition Members and the public have until 28 February to make their views known. That is why this debate is facile. No firm decisions have been taken and it is reprehensible for Opposition Members to try to scare passengers into thinking that they will get an inferior service after privatisation.

The public have a choice: they can use the railways or they can use their cars, or coaches, or various other forms of transport. Since 1953, there has been a decline in the number of people using the railways. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the numbers have gone down from 17 per cent. in 1953 to 5 per cent. today. The tale of freight is even more tragic. A poll in today's *Evening Standard* shows that more people would like to use the railways if the service were up to it.

We need to improve the whole range of services for passengers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said, a service should be advertised as much as possible so that as many people as possible have access to it. Through ticketing will be preserved, but we must also look at innovative ways by which people will have access to train tickets.

Clitheroe railway station is in my constituency and a service from there to Blackburn opened last year. Ticket facilities, including through ticketing, are provided not by British Rail but by a Clitheroe travel agent. I congratulate that Clitheroe travel agency on providing that imaginative service.

I hope that privatisation will improve stations because in the main they are miserable places. People sometimes have to wait 20, 30 or 40 minutes when changing trains, and much more could be done through investing in stations the sort of sums that BAA has invested in our airports. That should be done to provide comfort for passengers. I congratulate Keith Taylor and Ribble Valley council on holding an art exhibition in Clitheroe station to provide some pleasure for people who are waiting for trains. I also congratulate the regulator on reducing access charges for train operators who wish to use the lines. I hope that that will result in lower prices for consumers because we want to attract to the railways as many people as we can.

I had a letter last year from one of my constituents who had bought a ticket for his daughter at a cost of £8. When she could not use it her father sought a refund and was charged an administration fee of £5. That is outrageous, and I hope that that system will change. I have already brought the matter up with British Rail, which is not at all interested in the plight of one of its customers. It must do something about that.

I hope that after the changes more freight will be attracted to the railways because that would be good news. Castle Cement in my constituency has been forced off the railways by British Rail because of some of the high charges that have been introduced. I would be interested in hearing what Opposition Members propose to improve the service to rail customers and passengers—they have certainly not told us so far. We are not certain whether a future Labour Government would totally renationalise the railways, bringing the service back down to the level that people have experienced over the years.

We want to improve the quality of service for the public, and that can be done only through more private money being invested to improve lines such as the north-west coast main line, which runs through my constituency. That needs to be improved, and the only way to do it is by allowing access to private money. There has already been a fantastic investment of £15 billion in the railways since 1979, but it is not enough. As I say, more private money must be invested.

Such investment will attract more people to return to the railways, but that will certainly not happen if we follow what the Opposition have suggested. They do not have the slightest idea of policy on the railways. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has the policy somewhere. Perhaps it is in the boot of his car and he cannot work out where he has put it. If he ever does and he is able to read that policy

document, perhaps he will share Labour's rail policy with us. We are waiting to hear what it is but we do not want to wait for two years until the next general election to discover Labour's policy on rail nationalisation. Opposition Members now have an opportunity to tell us. The country is listening. Perhaps they will share their policy with us.

6.35 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): One has to retain a sense of humour when listening to Conservative Members. Their contributions ranged from a pathetic obsession with privatisation to sheer drivel. I shall not dignify them by responding to some of their points because this is a serious debate about through ticketing. They may not like it, but you will find out fairly soon in your constituencies as the station network is decimated and representations—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of the convention on the word "you".

Mr. McLeish: Conservative Members say that this debate is a waste of time and that they want to talk about our policies. We have heard about consultation. Does any hon. Member believe that the consultation smokescreen is anything other than a device to get the Secretary of State for Transport off the hook on which he is impaled?

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McLeish: I will not give way.

My hon. Friends repeatedly asked the Secretary of State for his view on the fiasco that the regulator has unleashed on passengers. He dug himself into a hole and he kept digging. He was rescued only when some of his hon. Friends started to speak about further aspects of privatisation. The key question for Conservative Members is whether there will be 300 or 500 stations.

Mr. Arnold: I will answer that.

Mr. McLeish: I am not giving way just now: I shall give way in a minute.

Is it to be 1,000 stations or, like us, do they want to make sure that there is no diminution of the existing network for through ticketing, which provides an excellent service to the travelling public?

Mr. Arnold: The hon. Gentleman asked whether there will be 300, 500 or 1,000 stations, but that is the wrong question. Why should people have to go many miles to a station to buy tickets? Why cannot they buy them at thousands of outlets in the same way as they can buy lottery tickets? That is the question that the hon. Gentleman should ask. They cannot buy tickets in that way because the nationalised British Rail insists that travel agents who sell rail tickets must use complicated, cumbersome and cost-driven paper systems. That is why the overwhelming majority of travel agents do not sell rail tickets.

Mr. McLeish: That was merely an abuse of an intervention.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House and the hon. Gentleman that interventions should be short.

Mr. McLeish: Let us have a unique and non-controversial idea injected into the debate. Possibly when one arrives at a station one might be able to buy a ticket. That seems to be one of the hallmarks of railway development this century. There is an obsession with the market. People are told to go to a Tesco or Safeway store for tickets. The Government want to take an axe and decimate the station network. Conservative Members may not like the facts, but one of them is that the regulator wants 294 core stations and that will mean first-class and second-class stations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McLeish: No, I shall not give way again.

Conservative Members know that even if people get access to trains there will be a problem. Through ticketing will become a nightmare and fares will rise because of the marketing mechanism that the Government envisage. I thought that we had just one national lottery, but the Government want to turn British Rail into a second lottery. I do not believe that any passenger or member of the public could support the notion that to cut the number of stations from 1,580 to 294 could be called progress.

Another phrase for what is happening is sheer lunacy. Conservative Members are dismayed by the fact that the public simply do not want privatisation. The issue of through ticketing is their first opportunity to become involved in that complicated process.

Conservative Members have lectured us on our policies, so it is with rich irony that I say that the Government want to smash British Rail into 100 private political pieces, sell them to the private sector and then claim that there will be a national rail network, that through ticketing will be an instant success and that passengers will enjoy more choice, greater accessibility, lower fares and a better service. It is an insult to the House to suggest that any of that could be taken seriously.

Mr. Clappison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. McLeish: No.

In the brief time available to me, I want to deal with two issues that the Government do not want to discuss. The first is why, between 7 and 10 January, the Secretary of State changed his mind so quickly on the question of through ticketing. When he was first approached about the leaked regulator's report, he was quick to say that the proposals were unacceptable. He acted on instinct or, possibly, out of ignorance. Two days later he acted on instructions from his Department, the basis of which was a little-known report prepared on 7 January 1993—the right hon. Gentleman may not even have seen it—that shows conclusively that the original decision to decimate the rail structure was not taken by the regulator, but was hatched in the report. The report states clearly that it

[Mr. McLeish]

envisages the number of stations offering through ticketing to be about 400 or 500. The regulator might have gone further than that.

The whole thing suggests a conspiracy. I shall use just one quote to show how the public have been conned. The report states:

"There are potential weaknesses in presenting the difficulties in option 3"—

that is, the free-for-all that the regulator now has. It continues:

"It offers no definitive guarantees and might lead to criticism that through ticketing in some areas could simply wither on the vine."

Does not that underline our case? Stations throughout the country will be removed from the through-ticketing system. Whether we call that withering on the vine or the Tory axe makes little difference.

I warn the Government that the report will be widely circulated to ensure that the regulator does not become the scapegoat for the Government's obsessive nature. Ministers may shake their heads, but they have not read the report. I can provide a copy for any Minister who wishes to read it. It is a "Policy-in-confidence" document sent to a "Mr. McCarthy", a "Mr. Freeman" and the Secretary of State. It is a long report.

The key issue is that the report shows that the public have been misled. For two years, behind closed doors, there has been a private agenda, while the public agenda has been, "Not me, guv, it's the regulator." We must speak up for the regulator tonight and say that he is being abused. The Government should come clean and say that it is not the regulator but they who initiated the proposal.

The Secretary of State is in a real tizzy about another issue. He is caught between a rock and a hard place. He wants to be able to say that, because the regulator is independent, he cannot interfere with him, but the right hon. Gentleman also wants to sit idly by and watch the rail network be decimated. Why cannot some courage and leadership be shown by the motley crew on the Conservative Front Bench—

Dr. Mawhinney: What is Labour's policy?

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State asks for our policy, but the real issue for the people of Britain is why a rail network that needs investment, encouragement and a way forward into the next century has to deal with the ravages of a privatisation which, in many people's eyes, is a fiasco. In fact, the media is running out of words to describe the mishmash of Government policy. The tragedy is that even if their objective could be accomplished, and it cannot, damage is being done to the morale of those who provide the service and to the very service itself.

Conservative Members keep asking us for our policy. Why do not the Government tell us why, for the first time since 1948, there will be no new orders for rolling stock from British Rail or from 25 operators? That is the question that the public want answered. They do not want the smokescreen of, "Where are your policies?" The Government are on a hook and it is high time that they dealt with some of the issues.

The Secretary of State waffled on about whether the regulator is so independent that the right hon. Gentleman can do nothing other than stand idly by. It was the Government who introduced and pushed through the House that ruination of a Railways Act in 1993. However, under section 4 the regulator and the Secretary of State have dual responsibilities and both have a duty to passengers. The same section also says that through ticketing is one of the subjects that will be covered by that— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. My views on seated interventions apply as equally to Secretaries of State as to anyone else.

Dr. Mawhinney: If the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) had been listening, he would know that I had dealt with that question in my speech.

Mr. McLeish: I enjoyed your rebuke of the Secretary of State, Madam Deputy Speaker, more than I enjoyed his subsequent intervention.

I want to conclude my remarks with two important points. First, the Government want us to believe that the problems are not their responsibility. They are trying to slide out of that key question of responsibility, but we have a document to support our claims. The issue is not the minimum or the maximum; it is not consultation—which is a sham anyway—it is whether, when the House divides, the Government are willing to support the proposal that 294 core stations should offer through ticketing while the remainder are abandoned to the vagaries of the market.

Secondly, will the Government now assume the responsibilities provided for in the Railways Act and inject some sanity into the debate about the future of the railways? I am a very moderate person; all I want is some common sense from the Government. The people of Britain share Labour's view; the passengers who use the network share our view. I hope that when the Minister for Railways and Roads responds to the debate he will be all sweetness and light, put the nonsense of the regulator's report behind him and begin to address the real issues that dominate the debate about the future of the rail network.

6.48 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I hope that I shall be all sweetness and light and so not disappoint the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) in that respect. He suggested that the consultation exercise—he called it a sham—was designed to get my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State off the hook. However, as I understood the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), he argued that the consultation exercise had put my right hon. Friend on the hook. Perhaps the two hon. Gentlemen should agree on which it is.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central then quoted, as is typical of the Labour party, from what he claimed was a secret report—something of dreadful import, which suggested that there should be between 400 and 500 core stations. Had he listened to my right hon. Friend's opening speech, he would have known—as he should have known anyway—that currently only 440 of British Rail's 2,500 stations have the physical capability to offer a complete through-ticketing service. In contrast to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, the hon. Member for Fife, Central said that he would speak up for the regulator who was being abused. I am sure that the hon. Member for Fife, Central had in mind some of the opening

comments of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who took considerable pains to rubbish the office and the person of the regulator.

I am surprised that there remains some scepticism among Opposition Members about the extent of the Government's commitment to through ticketing. We all know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a reputation for being a man who means what he says and says what he means. If Opposition Front-Bench Members had been listening to my right hon. Friend's excellent speech, they would have heard him reaffirm the Government's commitment to through ticketing.

Mr. Stevenson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: No, I must make progress at this stage.

My right hon. Friend went through the various occasions on which the Government's commitment has been reiterated. He dealt with the point on which the hon. Member for Fife, Central invited my right hon. Friend to comment, which is that section 4 of the Railways Act 1993 places a duty on the Secretary of State to promote measures to facilitate journeys involving more than one operator and states specifically that through ticketing is one such measure. My right hon. Friend went on to say that the same duty applies equally to the regulator, and that it was in the exercise of that duty that he published the consultation document on retailing tickets at stations. My right hon. Friend went on to explain that he also has the power to give guidance to the regulator under the Railways Act.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Minister answer two simple questions? If the consultation is a real exercise, when will the Government submit their response and what will be in it, especially in relation to the core station figure of 294?

Mr. Watts: Let us first allow the consultation process to get properly under way. Every interested party will be able to make representations, and I am sure that the regulator will look on today's debate as a part of that process. Certainly, my hon. Friends have made valuable points about the stations in their constituencies. Let us see what the regulator proposes should be the framework for imposing requirements on the operators. It would be premature, and almost churlish, of my right hon. Friend to start offering further guidance to the regulator before the consultation process has got properly under way.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Watts: No, I must make progress, or I feel that I shall not be able to reply to all the important points which have been made.

Let us return to the widespread myth that all British Rail stations provide a full range of ticketing facilities. Those who ask for a guarantee that the status quo will be maintained ought to ask themselves what the status quo is. The availability of a full service at stations is restricted by limitations on staff resources, fares information about remote journeys and ticket-issuing equipment.

More than 1,200 British Rail stations are totally unmanned and offer no staff ticketing facility. Only 440 stations have direct access to the seat reservation database which is critical to the issuing of some through tickets. British Rail itself has no central record of the precise range of ticketing services offered by every station in its network. The current position is that matters are left very much to local commercial judgment.

My hon. Friends and I, who represent some of the more marginal seats, have been threatened with dire consequences as a result of the regulator's consultation on through ticketing. Indeed, I was rather surprised that no Opposition Member made any mention of the impact of the proposals of the consultation on Slough. That may have been out of kindness, but, unlike my right hon. Friend, I am sometimes a slightly cynical man. The reason they did not mention it might have had something to do with the egg which the Labour party found on its face last week, when it announced that none of the three stations in my constituency would be a core station under the proposals set out in appendix A of the regulator's document. Of course, it was always the case that Slough, which is No. 56 in the hierarchy of stations selling a full range of through tickets and which has every facility—

Dr. Marek: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the Minister. The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) has just returned. Before you were in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, he said that many of my hon. Friends and I were sponsored and controlled by trade unions. *[Interruption.]* I took exception to that at the time, but I want your advice on the matter, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the hon. Member for Dartford is prepared to withdraw his remark, nothing further need be done. If he is not prepared to do that, may I ask you for permission to refer— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making a point of order. I expect to be able to hear it.

Dr. Marek: If the hon. Member for Dartford withdraws his remark, that will be the end of the matter. If not, may I have your advice as to how the matter can be raised in the Privileges Committee, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise a matter of privilege, the course for him is clear. The matter may not be discussed across the Floor of the House, and he must write directly to Madam Speaker.

Mr. Dunn: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course, I withdraw any imputation, if that is required, but the best way to clear up the matter up once and for all, and to avoid any misunderstanding in the future, would be for all Opposition Members to resign their sponsorships.

Mr. Bayley: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) suggested that there should be no fear for through ticketing because one could purchase tickets from travel agents, yet, when making that observation, he did not announce to the House that he is a paid consultant for a firm of travel agents.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I feel that the matter can now be dealt with adequately in other ways.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would have done so had you been kind enough to call me to speak.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We must now return to the debate. I ask hon. Members to remember that a very important debate is to follow this one.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Dartford

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

demanded that Opposition Members declare their interests when making interventions. The fact that many of my hon. Friends had not at that point made interventions may have escaped his notice. That seems to be the defence that the hon. Member for Gravesham is putting up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Deputy Speaker who was in the Chair earlier dealt with this matter at some length. I do not propose at this stage to take any more points of order on it.

Mr. Watts *rose—*

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The rules of the House state that a Member is required to declare an interest in any intervention, apart from during a question.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is up to each individual Member to decide when or how he makes a declaration of interest.

Mr. Watts: I was making the point that perhaps the egg which the Labour party found on its face last week when it made false claims about the impact of the proposals in the consultation document on my constituency led Labour Members to make no mention of the matter today. Indeed, the fact that they had to be corrected on that point shows clearly that they were indulging in their normal practice of commenting on a document which they had not bothered to read first.

The Opposition then switched their attack to the two other stations in my constituency, Langley and Burnham. Although they are both extremely important in offering services to my constituents who commute to London or Reading, neither of them has APTIS, so they are not capable of issuing a full range of tickets or of making seat reservations and selling tickets for InterCity services. If that is all that I have to fear, I have few qualms about facing my electorate in two years' time.

I am conscious of the importance of the debate that follows this one. I am sorry that I have not had an opportunity to respond to all the important constituency points that have been raised by hon. Members. I shall endeavour to do so as fully as possible by correspondence.

I invite the House to support overwhelmingly the amendment in the names of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to reject the Labour motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 282, Noes 317.

Division No. 39] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis

McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and
Mr. George Mudie.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bourn[illegible]th E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick

McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House reaffirms the Government's commitment to maintaining through ticketing; welcomes the publication by the Rail Regulator of the Consultation Document "Retailing of Tickets at Stations"; endorses the view expressed in the document that the continuation of network benefits such as through ticketing "will be one of the key tests of the success of the restructuring of the industry"; notes that despite massive investment in British Rail the proportion of travel undertaken and freight moved by train has steadily decreased during nationalisation; and supports the Government's commitment to seeking to reverse this decline through the creation of a flourishing railway system operated by the private sector which will offer a better deal for passengers and for freight customers.

Fisheries

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. There is to be a limit of 10 minutes on speeches and she trusts that Front Benchers will exercise considerable self-restraint.

7.14 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of the agreement of the Council of Fisheries Ministers, allowing Spanish fishing vessels into all areas of the Irish Box other than Area VIIa and Area VIIf north of 50° 30' and allowing increased access for Spanish fishing vessels to the remaining waters to the west of the United Kingdom; believes that this agreement presents an unacceptable threat to the long-term economic viability of fishing communities in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and places an unsustainable pressure upon the fish stocks in these already sensitive waters; and calls upon the Government to convey to the European Commission the extent to which this agreement has undermined the credibility of the Common Fisheries Policy in the view of the United Kingdom industry and to raise in the Council of Fisheries Ministers and in the European Council the whole question of the extent of access granted by the Common Fisheries Policy to non-United Kingdom registered vessels to fish in the waters around the United Kingdom.

The motion sets out—objectively, I believe—the agreement that was reached at the Council of Fisheries Ministers before Christmas and declares that it is unacceptable because of its implications for the long-term future of our fishing communities. It calls on the Government to spell out to Brussels the fact that the deal is undermining any confidence that our industry had in the common fisheries policy and urges the Minister to raise the question of access to British waters for non-British vessels.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: I must point out that I am not going to give way too frequently for the reason outlined by Madam Deputy Speaker, but I shall give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman now.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman and his party have repeatedly made it clear that they would accept without argument everything that came from Brussels so how can he, in all seriousness, move this motion when my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has negotiated an excellent deal, especially for the fishermen of the north-west coast, by ensuring that the Spanish continue to be excluded from the Irish sea?

Dr. Strang: If that is all that we are going to get, the less I give way the better. The hon. Gentleman talks nonsense. We have fundamentally opposed the common agricultural policy and have criticised aspects of the common fisheries policy. I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's point in the course of my speech.

The amendment calls on the House to congratulate the Government on securing the agreement. I do not know what sort of world Ministers are living in, but why has the agreement been denounced by all the fishermen's organisations? I refer hon. Members to a couple of headlines. *The Times* of 11 January 1995 contains the headline:

"fishermen plan to wage war on Spanish trawlers".

The accompanying article states:

"Fishermen in Devon and Cornwall yesterday promised a 'prolonged campaign' of action, beginning next month, to keep Spanish trawlers out of British waters . . . Mike Townsend, chief executive of the Cornish Fish Producers' Association, said that his members would consider any means possible to stop the Spanish fishing in the 90,000 square miles around Ireland."

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No, I am not giving way again. The headline in this week's *Fishing News* is "We face ruin". The first sentence of the article states that fishermen in the south-west

"say the Brussels deal on Spanish accession reached just before Christmas will destroy them. They totally reject it and say they will not take part in any further consultation to finalise the agreement."

As the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) knows, his colleagues who represent constituencies in the south-west criticised the deal before Christmas.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I have already dealt with the hon. Gentleman. I have given way once and may do so again but I shall not be interrupted after every sentence.

The truth is that the deal has been rejected by the fishing industry.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his view very clear. No hon. Member is obliged to give way unless he or she chooses to do so.

Dr. Strang: If the deal is so good that the House should congratulate the Government on it, why did not the Minister vote for it when it came before the Council of Fisheries Ministers after all the negotiations? When his grandchildren ask him what he did as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to keep the Spanish vessels out of British waters and to defend our fishing communities, the answer will be, "I abstained." It is nonsense to ask the House to congratulate the Government on the deal. The truth is that it is a bad deal and the House knows it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should not have to remind hon. Members twice in about two minutes of the normal rules and courtesies of the House.

Dr. Strang: It is not a good deal; it is a bad deal, and the Government know it. Spanish vessels will have new access to most areas of the Irish box. Contrary to the assertion in the Government's amendment, only area VIIa and the northern part of the Bristol channel will be protected. Spanish vessels will also have increased access to all other waters, stretching from the south-west of England to the north of Scotland.

Hon. Members who know anything about the fishing industry know perfectly well that stocks in those waters are under enormous pressure. They are sensitive waters and there is no case for additional fishing effort in them. There is no case for Spanish access to those

[Dr. Strang]

waters. Under the Spanish accession treaty, whatever deal was made on western waters other than the Irish box, it did not need come into effect until the year 2002. The Government have still to explain why they have allowed the changes to become effective from 1996.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I shall give way to one hon. Member—the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—and then I must continue.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he confirm that it will be part of Labour party policy to reclaim the territorial waters for British fishermen only?

Dr. Strang: I want a broad expression of view from Conservative Members. As the hon. Lady knows, we cannot accept her position on the European Union or the common fisheries policy. The common fisheries policy is flawed and it is time to address that problem.

It is a bad deal. The Government's first defence is the pretence that it is a good deal. The Government's second defence is that it was inevitable and there was no alternative but to negotiate an agreement along those lines. It is not good enough for the Minister to say that it was our opening position. In October 1993 the Minister of State explicitly said that the Council of Fisheries Ministers needed to agree to continue the current restrictions on access to the Irish box and the North sea. He said that the United Kingdom Government's concern was that the new arrangements should, in practice, confine Spanish and Portuguese fishing activities as closely as possible to the current pattern, but that was not accepted. Far from saying that increased access was inevitable, the Minister of State wanted the fishing activities to be confined to the historical pattern.

The deal is a reflection of the Government's failure to represent the United Kingdom's national interest in Europe. Since 1985 the Government have had a chance to win support for a fair deal for our fishermen. All the Government needed to secure was the support of two other member states, one of which had to be a major state such as Italy or Germany. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] Conservative Members ask, "Who?" How was it that the Government could not obtain the support of even Germany or Italy? It is disturbing to realise that we have come to the stage when, if an Opposition spokesperson asks the Government why they could not obtain the support of one large member state and one small member state in the European Union, Conservative Members laugh. That is a measure of how far we have sunk and how hopeless our position is in Europe. The Government are totally unfit to represent the British national interest.

The Government's policy on Europe does not reflect what needs to be done. It does not reflect the interests of our fishermen, but the Government's need to go with the shifting pattern of opinion and divisions on Europe within the Conservative party. It is a clear example of the Government's failure, not just on this subject, but on others, adequately to argue the case and win the argument for Britain in the European Union.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): What would the hon. Gentleman do?

Dr. Strang: I am grateful for that intervention from a sedentary position and I shall answer the question of how we move forward from here—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members might not think that the debate is important, but many people outside the Chamber are interested in it. There are many people in the fishing communities and the wider British community who are interested in our debate and hon. Members should have the courtesy to allow the mover of the motion to be heard.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member constantly to refer to the south-west while adamantly refusing to give way to anyone from the south-west?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is perfectly in order, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Dr. Strang: There is a strong rumour—

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to refer to a lack of interest in the debate among Conservative Members when our Benches are packed and the Opposition Benches are sparsely occupied?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The occupant of the Chair is not responsible for the content of speeches—I am thankful to say.

Dr. Strang: It would be wise to continue the debate.

There is a strong rumour that the Government will this evening announce that they are to provide additional cash aid for the industry. Hon. Members who take a close interest in fisheries matters will be aware of the state of play between the industry and the Government. But some hon. Members participating in the debate may not be fully apprised of the situation. They may not recognise that we are soon to see the spectacle of the United Kingdom Government fighting the United Kingdom fishing industry in the European courts. The Government's compulsory tariff scheme has been referred by the High Court to the European Court of Justice.

Hon. Members may not be aware that in July 1993 the Government invited fisheries organisations to submit proposals for the way forward on conservation. Those organisations—including the Scottish Fisherman's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations—submitted excellent proposals, which they went to great lengths to achieve and which often caused controversy in their ranks. What has the Government's reaction to the proposals been so far? Nothing.

Hon. Members may not be aware that, after years of refusal, in 1992 the Government finally conceded that a decommissioning scheme should be introduced. A small scheme has been launched. The Select Committee on Agriculture concluded that it was so small that the cuts achieved would be more than offset by efficiency gains in the remainder of the fleet.

Extra money is needed for the modernisation and improvement of our port facilities. If the Government announce extra money tonight for decommissioning, modernisation and our port facilities—additional aid from our Government for the fishing industry—that will be welcomed. But there is a problem. If extra money is to be made available for a decommissioning scheme it must be remembered that the point of decommissioning was to bring our fishing effort and capacity into line with the stocks. It is unacceptable that money should be announced for decommissioning that is intended to facilitate Spanish access in our waters. It is unacceptable that our fishermen should be asked to take up a decommissioning scheme which proposes to scrap their vessels not in order to bring the fishing fleet in line with fishing stocks, but to enable Spanish vessels to catch our fish. Of course, Government assistance is welcome; but it is not sufficient. We have to address the issue at the European level.

Much of the package is yet to be agreed. For example, we do not know how many additional Spanish vessels will have access to the waters north of the Irish box. We know that vessels must be listed on a register and that each Government will put forward their proposals for controlling the fishing effort of each member state. Therefore, it seems that not only will Governments put forward vessels to go on the register but each Government will propose a system for controlling the fishing effort. Presumably, that means that different countries will have different arrangements for controlling the fishing effort. Perhaps the Minister will explain that.

Important parts of the deal are yet to be settled. The House of Commons must make it clear that we want a better arrangement and a more satisfactory outcome than the one that was agreed before Christmas.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: I will give way to one hon. Member from the south-west, and that is it.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has said that he does not favour abandoning the common fisheries policy, although that is what the fishermen now want. He said that he is in favour of improving the common fisheries policy. Can he list the improvements that he made to that policy during the Labour Government of 1975 to 1979?

Dr. Strang: The common fisheries policy as it currently exists came into operation in the early 1980s and it was reviewed in the early 1990s. Of course, there were arrangements prior to that. The Minister should tell the Commission that, as a result of the latest agreement, our fishermen have lost any faith that they had in the common fisheries policy.

Effective conservation is possible only with the co-operation and support of the fishermen. Our motion calls on the Minister to raise with the Commission the question of access by non-British vessels to our waters.

I believe that the common fisheries policy is fundamentally flawed. The overriding objective of any fisheries policy—whether it is a British fisheries policy, a common fisheries policy for the European Union, or a Canadian fisheries policy—should be to conserve fishing stocks for future generations of fishermen. In my opinion, the common fisheries policy is not designed to achieve that aim. The Government have an obsession with avoiding national discrimination and they have reached the point of allowing foreign vessels with no historical pattern of fishing in the area to enter our waters. We have to meet that issue head on.

The problem will not be solved overnight. The Government should not pretend that it is a good deal; it is not. It is no use their pretending that it was the best that could be achieved in the circumstances. I am not talking about what happened at the December Council; the situation has built up over two or three years. We are now in a position whereby we cannot muster the support needed to block the deal on the basis of qualified majority voting.

It will not be enough for hon. Members to abstain from voting on the motion this evening. The fishing communities and the British people as a whole want the motion to be carried. Britain has a proud maritime history. Our fishing communities are part of the economic and social fabric of this country.

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Opportunistic nonsense.

Dr. Strang: If the hon. Gentleman does not understand the way that the British people feel about our fishing communities he does not understand what the debate is about. The British people want the motion to be passed because they want to see arrangements which will enable our fishing communities to have the opportunity—I put it in no stronger terms than that—

Mr. Sykes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Why is the hon. Gentleman answering sedentary interventions, but not those interventions from the Floor?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. I also add my well-known view that sedentary interventions are not acceptable, and I hope that they will cease.

Mr. Sykes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No, I will not give way. Madam Deputy Speaker has asked us to make our speeches brief. The new arrangements recommended by the Jopling report also ask Front Bench speakers to be brief. I have already given way on numerous occasions.

Our motion is in the best interests of the fishing communities. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks). Their amendment accepts the Opposition motion in its entirety and simply adds a few sentences with which I do not disagree.

The Opposition motion, which has been accepted by those Conservative Members who represent fishing communities, aims to defend the long-term future of our fishing industry. It has the support of the British people and I urge the House to vote for it.

7.36 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): I beg to move, to leave out from "Ministers" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on securing the exclusion of Spanish fishing vessels from the Irish Sea and the Bristol Channel, the limiting of Spanish fishing within the rest of the Irish Box to 40 vessels simultaneously and the inclusion of special restrictions on Spanish vessels within the Box West of Scotland; notes that the agreement does not call into question the continued exclusion of Spanish vessels from the North Sea and the principle of relative stability; recognises this outcome represents a major improvement for United Kingdom fishermen compared to the original Commission proposals, the negotiation of which was made more difficult by the failure to win Hague Preferences for South West English fishing communities in 1976; welcomes the undertaking the Government secured from the Commission to provide annual reports on the findings of Commission Fisheries Inspectors; notes the Government's current annual expenditure of some £25 million on fisheries enforcement and welcomes the Government's commitment to ensure effective policing of the agreement; welcomes the Government's success in extending the benefits of the EC's structural programmes to areas of the United Kingdom dependent on fishing; notes that the Government are also spending some £17 million per annum on fisheries research and monitoring and some £5 million per annum on other forms of assistance to the fisheries sector; notes the Government's current substantial programme of decommissioning expenditure; and welcomes its commitment to provide further programmes in 1996-97 and 1997-98.".

Madam Deputy Speaker, you requested Front Bench speakers to be brief in their remarks during the debate, but I do not think that you precluded hon. Members from making speeches. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) failed to make a speech; it slipped his mind.

Indeed, the issue has slipped the Labour mind on a number of occasions. A good way of gauging the importance that a party attaches to an issue is to look at what it says about it in its election manifesto. The hon. Gentleman does not want to be reminded that the Labour party said nothing about fishing in its election manifesto of 1992. It is even more extraordinary—in view of the common fisheries policy and other crucial European issues—that there was nothing about it in the Labour party's Euromanifesto either. That is a better test of the Opposition's sincerity than the hon. Gentleman's rather thin speech.

All hon. Members know that the Labour party does not care two hoots about fishing; with one or two honourable exceptions, it knows nothing about the subject. The hon. Gentleman moved the motion in an attempt to score some political points and to make a few headlines tomorrow by persuading one or two of my hon. Friends to support him. That is what the Opposition's motion is about; it is not about United Kingdom fishing communities at all.

Mr. Sykes: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for at last allowing me to say something in the debate. If he goes back even further he will find that the Labour party's 1987 election manifesto also did not say a word about fishing. One needs a magnifying glass to find what the Labour party has said about fishing. If the Opposition are so concerned about the issue, why have they tacked on a measly three-hour debate at the end of an Opposition day debate? If they really cared about fishing, they would have allowed a full day for debate and not a measly three hours.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is clear that the Opposition consider the matter far less important than through ticketing on the railways.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East made some straightforward mistakes. He said:

"I mean, for a start, originally these changes were not going to come into operation till year 2002."

In fact, the Spanish act of accession provided for the Irish box arrangements to end after 1995. It also provided for the other restrictions to be reviewed in 1993. The hon. Gentleman ought to correct that misstatement. The radio interviewer was not fully briefed on the subject and did not realise that the hon. Gentleman had not got it right.

Dr. Strang: If the right hon. Gentleman reads the transcript of the debate that we had before Christmas, he will see that we reached agreement on the position. The Irish box arrangements ended automatically, but a whole lot of other arrangements outwith the Irish box could have continued until 2002.

Mr. Waldegrave: All the ships on the reference list would have had no restrictions on access whatever and there would have been no controls on the Irish box.

On the "Today" programme today, when the question at issue was the Irish box, the hon. Gentleman said:

"I mean, for a start, originally these changes were not going to come into operation until the year 2002".

He should have made it clear to the interviewer that the Irish box failed, as it would have done in 1996.

The Opposition's own policy, which I shall mention as the hon. Gentleman has not done so, is called regionalisation. The hon. Gentleman made it up in one or two radio studios around the country. As I understand it, the basis of it is that we should have controls to limit the access of fishermen from one region of the United Kingdom to other regions of the United Kingdom and other parts of the Community. That would be wonderful for the fishermen at Brixham, who spend a great deal of time in the North sea, and for the tuna, mackerel and herring fishermen who have to follow stocks which migrate. Sailors from Lowestoft, and the Grimsby sailors who are well known to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), go to Norwegian, Dutch and Danish waters. The hon. Gentleman's policy would restrict them—or, in his words, regionalise them— around the coasts of the United Kingdom. It is a typical half-baked, meaningless Labour policy made up on the run in an interview studio and probably already abandoned.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I understand that the Minister's own track record is that he attended one Fisheries Council and abstained at one. Does he feel sufficiently in command of his subject to lecture anyone else about their knowledge or lack of it in respect of the fishing industry?

Mr. Waldegrave: I feel every confidence in lecturing the Labour Front Bench spokesman. If the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) wishes to defend the Labour party on this, that is an internal problem for him which I shall not seek to enter into at present.

The fact that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East is confused is confirmed by the fact that he said something completely different before Christmas, when he stated:

"The problem is in the short run and right up to the year 2002 we have to operate within the framework of the current CFP".

That is the end of the regionalisation policy, so the pirouettes have already taken place, as they do elsewhere in his party.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who I am sure has a great deal of good will and sympathy from everyone on this side of the House. Among the farrago of nonsense from the Opposition Front Bench spokesman was the question of how one explains to the fishing community why we are paying to take our boats out of the water so that the fish that they would otherwise have caught will now be caught by the Spanish and Portuguese. Would it be right to suggest that the answer is that under qualified majority voting the Luxemburgers have 20 times as much influence per capita over what happens to British fish, so there is very little that the Government can do about it until we come out of the Common fisheries policy?

Mr. Waldegrave: I shall come to decommissioning at the proper place in my speech. I remind my hon. Friend that there is nothing in the deal or in the accession deal which gives any more fish to Spain under the quota system. We have about 43 per cent. of the quotas in the relevant western waters. Spain has about 2 per cent. of the quotas in those relevant western waters. That has not changed, and nor has the balance between them.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the agreement that he reached, which was better than was predicted, raised our quotas by £14 million above the level originally suggested by the Commission?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is indeed so. We negotiated a number of the swaps that are usually undertaken. For instance, we got a large extra tonnage of cod and whiting for the northern Irish fishermen, which is extremely useful to them.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): One understands about the quota, but Spanish fishermen will also be allowed to fish without limit non-quota stock in the Irish sea, which will affect the fishermen of Brixham considerably.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is perfectly true, but the crucial point is that the fishing effort cannot increase overall. That is the point on which we have to stand.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: Let me proceed a little. I want briefly to remind the House, as I want to get on to the positive actions that we can take, about the Labour record on the issue.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East made great play of how I should have done this or that. For five years, between 1974 and 1979, his party negotiated with various specific objectives and had the benefit of the veto as it was before qualified majority voting. Its performance was lamentable. Mr. David Owen, who was then part of the Labour party and may be again for all I know—

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): No chance.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman says, "No chance". Lord Owen gave away the vital issue of Hague preferences for the south-west. Had he not made a complete mess of that negotiation in 1976, much of the pressure on south-western fishermen that we are debating today would have been relieved as they would have had the same privileges as Irish and Scottish fishermen. That was a poor piece of negotiation and he had the veto to deploy.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My right hon. Friend knows the ins and outs of the matter, but can he explain why we did not properly renegotiate the common fisheries policy in the run-up to the Maastricht negotiations?

Mr. Waldegrave: It was not on the agenda at that time. I shall come to the future in due course, but I hope that my hon. Friend will hear something that he likes about how the British Government will approach the measures.

The truth of the negotiation before December was set out with typical lucidity and clarity by my right hon. and noble friend Lord Tebbit talking on the radio just before Christmas. He was kind enough to agree with the interviewer, who put the proposition to him that I got the best possible deal for Britain. My right hon. and noble Friend went on to say:

"It does go back to the accession agreement and it was thought at that time to be in British national interests that the Spaniards should be brought in, and I guess in the longer term it probably is."

At the time, the House supported that position. My noble friend Lady Thatcher said:

"The terms are very satisfactory for the United Kingdom."

The then Leader of the Opposition, now the European Commissioner for Transport, said:

"I welcome the enlargement of the European Economic community membership with the accession of the newest democracies of Spain and Portugal".—[*Official Report*, 2 April 1985; Vol. 76, c. 1061-62.]

The Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), said:

"We welcome the accession of Spain and Portugal. The Opposition do not welcome accession blindly or ignorantly or oblivious of the difficulties and anxieties".—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 883.]

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, went a great deal further, saying:

"By bringing Spain into the fisheries regime and now applying to Spain the regulations on, for example, mesh sizes, we are exerting a control which would not have been possible if Spain had remained outside the Community. It was very difficult to get and I congratulate the Government on it."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 335.]

[Mr. Waldegrave]

I hope that the Liberal Democrats will be honest enough to stand by what their spokesman said then and vote down the motion today because they know perfectly well that the negotiation— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House again that if the Minister does not give way, others must resume their seats.

Mr. Waldegrave: Opposition Members know perfectly well that what I was negotiating in December was winning back ground that they realised at the time would be lost.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend reflect for a moment on his remark that the Labour Government were negotiating with the advantages of the veto? After his experience, where many of us would concede that he made a good job of a difficult position, is it now the Government's considered view that negotiations about our territorial waters ought not to be subject to qualified majority voting?

Mr. Waldegrave: If things had fallen out differently and we had had no qualified majority voting on the matter, I would have found negotiating easier and I would have done a great deal better than John Silkin, who gained nothing even though he had the veto to deploy.

The position now, as my hon. Friend knows, is that as part of the Single European Act, out of which great benefits came in the establishment of the single market, qualified majority voting covers those issues which affect the single market. It is a good moment to make the point that our fishermen benefit greatly from the single market. We export about £450 million worth of fish and fish products to the single market and to the European market. Fishermen from our ports catch species which do not have a real market in the United Kingdom for historical reasons. Those fish are sold at much higher prices in Europe than if the single market did not exist. If our fishermen had to export against tariff barriers, they would not enjoy that income. By a tradition going back hundreds of years, people in this country eat much less fish than the French or Spanish. The Spanish eat 70 lb of fish per head each year while the figure for the UK is 14 lb. We must maintain access to that market for the sake of our fishermen.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister give way now?

Mr. Waldegrave: I must press on or I shall get into trouble with Madam Deputy Speaker.

Until an hour or two before the December negotiations ended, we were steadily winning back ground and secured extra gains—particularly in relation to Scotland, which is why I abstained rather than voted against. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East rightly said, the negotiations are continuing because there are other matters to negotiate. If people are giving things, it is bad negotiating policy not to respond. The hon. Gentleman has experience of that. He was good at negotiating with his colleagues between 1974 and 1979 and obtaining nothing. After five years of steady negotiation to extend fishery limits from 12 miles to 50 miles, the limits remained at 12 miles.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I did not claim then and do not claim now that we returned triumphant, having won everything, but we achieved two thirds of our objectives. If the strict legislative and legal basis had been followed, we could have returned with nothing. People know that it was not a bad deal. The Spanish know that, too. Just before Christmas, the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* commented:

"Inevitably, the Spanish fishery associations will see no cause for celebration."

Correct. *El Mundo* quoted Jaime Tejedor, chairman of the Basque country fishermen's association, describing as "terrorism by the state" the agreement allowing Spain limited access to European Union fisheries in 1996. He said:

"If they were going to give up like this, there was no need to go to Brussels to negotiate. I thought they were going to be firm this time, that they were going to defend our fishing industry to the hilt, as the President of the Government, Felipe Gonzalez, promised, even to the extent of vetoing the enlargement of the EU, but that isn't what happened."

That is quite right—it is not what happened. The report continued:

"The Galician fishermen spoke in similar terms, and consider 'unacceptable' the discrimination against the Spanish fleet regarding its exclusion from the Irish Box. They believe the agreement will bring little benefit to Spain from 1996, since it establishes further limitations on the fleet's access to resources and maintains the unequal treatment to which Spain has been subjected since the treaty of accession was signed."

Another *El Mundo* report stated:

"Spain will join the Common Fisheries Policy on 1 January 1996 . . . The compromise agreed yesterday is a long way from the full participation in the CFP sought by the Spanish Government."

Those are true and sober assessments from the Spanish end—how it looks from Spain. We returned with a continuation of the Irish box, with only 40 ships in it, whereas halfway through the negotiations the Spanish still wanted 70, and there might have been no Irish box protection. We kept them out of the Irish sea and the Bristol channel, and we maintained their exclusion from the North sea, which is crucial to British fishermen.

When there are further big negotiations on the common fisheries policy in 2002, or perhaps earlier, we shall have established Spain's exclusion from large areas as part of a non-discriminatory and balanced policy. That will give far better hopes of keeping control in the long-term future. We have added two extra zones to the North sea under that principle.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East correctly quoted a headline from *Fishing News*, but for some reason he did not quote its comment on 6 January:

"The Ministers did fight hard in Brussels and got more than many feared."

That, too, is correct. People who really understand the issue know that it was not a bad deal in a weak situation.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): My right hon. Friend will notice that the Order Paper includes an amendment in the names of hon. Friends from the far

south-west emphasising the need for a Government commitment to negotiate with our European partners to ensure fundamental changes in the CFP and, in the interim, to introduce a meaningful decommissioning scheme—for which right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House have asked.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. We need a CFP that is better at controlling stocks. No one doubts that there is too much fishing capacity in Europe, including the United Kingdom. A decommissioning scheme is needed so that our fleet is profitable and there can be reinvestment in building new ships. That will secure the industry's long-term future against a background of somewhat lower fishing effort.

I can tell my hon. Friend and others who have raised the same point—including my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), the hon. Member for North Down (Sir J. Kilfedder) and the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor)—of a further addition to the decommissioning scheme. We will add to the present scheme of £25 million over three years a further £28 million, more than doubling the size of the scheme. It is essential that the British fleet should be profitable and trade at full capacity and the scheme will secure the long-term future better than anything else. That is one of the things that we must do immediately, to make the present situation work.

In the House the other day, a number of my hon. Friends rightly raised the question of enforcement: although Spain has small quotas and we have the biggest, we do not believe that the Spanish play according to the rules. We are not alone in the world in believing that: the Canadians and the Norwegians tell the same story. As none of this starts until next year, we have a little time to review our enforcement systems: our assets, the Royal Navy ships; aerial surveillance, which will be vital; and how to make the hailing in and hailing out system work. Also, my noble Friend Lord Howe reported to the other place yesterday on the satellite system which is under trial.

The Commission inspectorate, which this Government brought into being as a result of work by Lord Walker, is to report back and to be strengthened. Above all, the deployment of Royal Navy ships must be strengthened and correctly located.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I will give way to my hon. Friend, who comes from a relevant region.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that although additional decommissioning money is most welcome, there is a requirement by the Commission to reduce our overall fleet by 19 per cent. by the end of 1996, but that the industry itself calculates that the sum required will be not less than £75 million?

Mr. Waldegrave: That will not be the only measure in place, as my hon. Friend will be aware from his knowledge of the subject. I hope that he accepts our good faith in putting money on the table today, which shows that we will meet the programme and are taking it seriously. Most of my right hon. and hon. Friends will welcome the statement that I have made. The fishing industry will certainly welcome it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose—*

Mr. Waldegrave: I will get into a good deal of trouble if I give way so much that no time is left even for the eloquent speeches that Opposition Members are doubtless capable of making.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not complain that I have not been allowed to intervene on the Minister, but is it not discourteous to the House for a Minister to give way uniquely to hon. Members on his own side?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. It is for the Minister to decide whether or not to give way.

Mr. Waldegrave: It may have escaped the hon. Gentleman's attention that I gave way several times to his hon. Friends earlier in the debate.

The present system of fisheries management—I think that I shall take most people with me on this—is highly complex, burdensome on fishermen and expensive to operate. For the longer term, we need to look for ways of simplifying it, to see whether it could be more effectively market driven, while still ensuring that exploitation of fish stocks is sustainable. I want to look at a range of ideas and to learn from what other countries are doing—from New Zealand to Norway, from Canada to the south Atlantic—with different types of quota systems and fisheries management, different approaches to enforcement, and so on. I shall also want to examine the scope for further action in technical areas, including technical conservation and discard policy—one of the most offensive aspects of current systems for managing fish.

Over the years, much thought has been given to these matters, but if we can find better approaches I shall want to discuss them with our industry and, if they seem workable, to take them up with the Fisheries Council.

I therefore intend to ask the fisheries Minister, who enjoys an almost unique degree of respect in the industry for the work that he has done, to convene a group, parallel to the one that I established to review the common agricultural policy, to review the common fisheries policy and to look at all these options again, particularly with a view to limiting overfishing and bureaucracy. We must remove bureaucracy from this business wherever it is found.

Some concern has been expressed on another front currently in the news—the projected framework document on Northern Ireland—that there could be provision for a joint north-south marine fisheries policy for the island. I make it plain today that we do not intend there to be such a policy and that we shall make no such proposals.

We shall be looking at the costs and the benefits. We shall be looking at the undoubted problems that the CFP poses for us. We shall also be looking at the benefits of our participation in the single market, which I discussed earlier with my hon. Friends. We need a modern, profitable fleet investing in new boats and new

[Mr. Waldegrave]

technology. That is already happening in some places. It is not all doom and gloom. Some areas have had good years and new boats are being built at this very moment—

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): A few moments ago the Minister said something which requires a little clarification. Can he confirm that there will be no cross-border committee in Ireland with executive powers over fishing?

Mr. Waldegrave: I confirm what I said—that we make it plain that we do not intend that there should be provision for joint north-south marine fisheries. No one knows better than the right hon. Gentleman—I am not sure that he did not invent them himself—that there are some special arrangements governing inland waters, but we will not have joint arrangements with the Republic to deal with common fisheries policy matters.

As I have said, we need a modern fleet. Today Labour Members have tried to make political capital out of the fishing industry, pretending a sudden concern for it even though they forgot to include it in their manifesto. That is to play politics with the future of a serious industry. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will not fall for that old ploy. I remind them of what the Leader of the Opposition has said about negotiating in Europe—that he will negotiate in a consensual manner and that he will never be isolated in Europe. He will never do what poor old John Silkin did, sitting there for five years, with a veto, and getting nowhere at all. At least Silkin had the courage to be isolated. The Leader of the Opposition is throwing in the towel before he has even started on all these issues.

I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject this piece of opportunism from the party of Silkin and of Owen—the party which has now said that it will never stand alone in Europe. We should reject this ridiculous motion and see it for what it is: a rather pathetic ploy to try to mislead and to make political capital out of the fishing industry. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to throw out the Labour motion and to vote for our amendment.

8.3 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): We shall find out at 10 o'clock tonight whether the bait on the long line that the Minister has cast will be swallowed by those in whose direction it was clearly aimed. I have argued in the House on many occasions in favour of decommissioning. Indeed, the Minister echoed some of my arguments for bringing fishing capacity into line with available stocks. If that was his reason for strengthening the decommissioning scheme, we would warmly welcome it, although we would probably say that the money was not enough.

It was only a matter of weeks ago—on 14 December—that the Minister of State told us that none of this would be possible. The right hon. Gentleman's speech this evening will be regarded by fishermen, especially in the south-west of England, as providing millions of pounds of taxpayers' money simply to lay up British vessels, which will have to make way for Spanish vessels entering our waters. The Secretary of State refused to say whether the additional £28 million will be spread throughout the United Kingdom, in line with the arrangements now in force for decommissioning. The Minister of State must answer that question and tell us whether the money will be concentrated on the areas most affected by the agreements reached by the Council of Ministers.

It is welcome to see so many hon. Members in the Chamber expressing an interest in the fishing industry. I hope that they will attend many of our future debates on the subject. Those of us who participated in December's debate were in no doubt as to the depth of feeling about the important decision that was to be taken at the Council meeting. We know, too, about the outcry and the expressions of utter dejection on the part of many in the industry thereafter. The fact that we are holding this debate shows just how badly let down the industry has felt following the meeting of the Council of Ministers. Salt was rubbed in the wound when the Minister could not even bring himself to vote against the deal. Tonight, he has moved an amendment which amounts to nothing but self-congratulation.

This decision was not just one of a kind; it is the latest in a series of decisions which have adversely affected the industry. To be fair to him, the Minister of State did a great deal of work during the run-up to the negotiations, talking to the industry and lobbying some of our European partners. During last year's European election campaign, I met fishermen in Devon and Cornwall who believed that they were getting a raw deal the whole time, however, because their industry operated so far from London, in scattered communities. They thought that their interests did not feature largely enough in the minds of Ministers, and that the issues concerning the industry were always subordinated to others. I fear that that impression will have been reinforced this evening, and by the decisions taken in Brussels at the end of December.

One key example of the betrayal of the fishing industry's interests was also the forerunner of these discussions. I saw the Minister look to his Minister of State to find out the answer to this when pressed earlier in the debate. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East was right: with the exception of the Irish box, which, it was always known, was to be renegotiated before the end of 1995, the other arrangements in respect of Spanish and Portuguese access were to remain in place until the end of the year 2002. That was set out in a letter from the former Commissioner to our Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, then President of the Council of European Communities. The Commissioner set out the legal position on 23 December 1992:

"the general arrangements in the Act of Accession, as regards conditions of access and fishing by the Spanish and Portuguese fleets in the waters of the 'Ten' and vice versa, remain in force until 31 December 2002".

But this House has never been told why the Government supported the Council of Ministers' decision to go back on that.

On 24 June 1993, the Council of Ministers took the view that the

"adjustments to the accession arrangements should be undertaken in the spirit of the reform, in order to strengthen its impact."

What reform? What impact? The House has never been told. The Minister owes us and the fishing industry an explanation of why the pass was sold at such an early stage.

The deal that was struck gives rise to a whole series of other questions, too. The Minister won a valuable concession at an earlier Council meeting, when we were

told that the Irish box had become a biologically sensitive zone. How can 40 more vessels enter part of that zone while it is maintained that the British fleet will not be compromised? How does the Minister square that circle?

The Minister said today that the whole Bristol channel would be denied to Spanish vessels. That all depends on how the Bristol channel is defined. The Trevoes head area is one of the most sensitive in terms of breeding stocks, yet the Spanish will have access to it. Will that really be the case? Will that not destroy the conservation purpose of the area? Important issues will arise in fleshing out the deal.

At present, 18 standard Spanish vessels are allowed in the waters of area VI north of the Irish box. It is unclear how many will be allowed in after the deal. Is the Minister able to tell us how many Spanish vessels will be allowed in that area? Will there be more than 18?

We have been told that a system of effort control might be required of member states. What will the Government propose?

What happened to deregulation? I remember that after the meeting of the Council in November deregulation was claimed to be one of the great successes of the British negotiation. I endorsed much of what the Minister said about the need to reduce bureaucracy, but the deal that we are discussing will increase bureaucracy. We shall have more regulation.

The Minister was silent on swaps. I understand that he was silent after the meeting of the Council of Fisheries because he did not know what had happened. As a result of swaps between Spain and, I think, Belgium and France, Spain will be able to fish for cod, haddock, whiting and saithe in areas of western waters where its fishermen were not hitherto allowed.

Can Spain enter into swaps with other European Community nations in, for example, the North sea, which would give it the right to fish in the area for stocks? The Minister shakes his head. I invite him to deny now that the Spanish cannot enter into swaps and get the right to fish white fish in the North sea and, therefore, upset relative stability.

The problem was that the Government were isolated in Europe. When it came to a critical national issue, they had no friends. In the midst of negotiations, Mr. Robert Shrimsley of *The Daily Telegraph* wrote:

"One Tory source said that Mr. Major had been attempting to call in favours across Europe to find an acceptable compromise."

We saw the result of the Prime Minister's efforts. Imagine him phoning the Belgium Prime Minister and saying, "Mr. Dehaene, I did you a great favour by saving you from becoming the president of the Commission. Will you do us a favour and save our vital national fishing interests?"

Year after year, the Government have taken a negative attitude in Europe. When the time comes to try to cash in some credit, they find that they do not have any. Britain's national interests have been fatally compromised by the Government's isolationist approach to European matters for far too long.

The Minister has said that a working group may be set up to reform the common fisheries policy. He told the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) that he could not do it earlier because it was not on the agenda at the time of Maastricht. He conveniently avoided mentioning that the following year the CFP was up for review, during a period when Britain had presidency of the Council. The Government did not take that opportunity.

We welcome the Minister's statement that he is to set up a working party. No doubt, the fishing industry will contribute to it, as it did in 1993 when it was asked for its views on how to take forward technical conservation ideas. Its views seem to have gathered dust either in the Scottish Office or in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We want a commitment that this time the industry's ideas will be given serious treatment. If we are looking to a review of the CFP, let us have a commitment that the views of the industry will be not only sought but acted on.

Somewhere along the line, the Commission has lost its way. No longer does it appear, as once it did, to have in its focus the needs of many of our fishing industries and fishing communities around our coastline. If we are to review the CFP, we must look to those communities where families depend so much on fishing opportunities. They seem to have been sacrificed in the most recent deal and in a series of deals. We shall support the motion not least because it would enable a fundamental review to be undertaken.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that, between now and the replies by the Front-Bench speakers, speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

8.14 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): First, I shall say a few words about my ministerial colleagues and their performance in Brussels at the climax of protracted negotiations. The climax came on 22 December, when what I think was a disgraceful episode occurred and the United Kingdom was outvoted. I only wish that we had had the veto on fishing policy. I cannot help but observe that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the party represented by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)—I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman is not in the Chamber this evening—would give away the last vestiges of our veto in Europe. That is by the by.

I return to the Ministers. I have one criticism, and one alone, about the way in which they conducted the negotiations, or the way in which they acted. They fought hard and they fought well, and there is much in what they say, given the rotten nature of the hand that they had to play in Brussels during the negotiations. My one criticism is that, despite what my right hon. Friend the Minister said tonight, he abstained rather than voting against the deal. I believe that he should have voted against it.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has, I believe, been the finest Minister with responsibilities for fishing that we have had for many a long year. I pay full tribute to all that he has done, especially in re-establishing links with the industry and the trust of the industry. I am sad that this evening much of the good work that he has done might well be in jeopardy because of the understandable attitude of the industry to what happened in Brussels.

I loathe what happened in Brussels on 22 December. In my opinion—I have used the phrase before—it was a cynical stitch-up of an agreement, which was led by the Commission. All sorts of bilateral deals were struck,

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particularly the quota swap between France and Spain that will increase Spanish fishing opportunities. I am sorry to say that at the end of the day the United Kingdom was left completely and utterly isolated. There was little it could do but fight a rearguard action. I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister did well, along with the Minister of State, in fighting that action.

Where are we left? What is the future for our fishing industry? I do not mind admitting that I have always described myself as a pragmatic European. I was a Member of the European Parliament for five years. The result of the negotiations, however, has had a profound effect on my attitude to Europe, to our relationship with Europe and to the way in which we shall in future approach fisheries problems. Although the negotiations were about fishing, they encapsulated so many of our difficulties, as I see it, in our future relationships and in the way in which member states will be treated.

What was wrong, and perhaps different, about the negotiations was that, in my reading of the situation, there was no acceptable compromise, I believe that there was a ganging-up against the United Kingdom. I accept that the deal was unpopular in Spain among the fishermen as well but there was a ganging-up by the other member states, egged on by the Commission, and we were skewered in Brussels.

What happens now? We have not reached the end of the story. There are further stages in the CFP. Above all, in 2002 there must be a complete revision of the policy. That will be done on the basis of qualified majority voting. We shall not have a veto. Liberals welcome that, but I do not. Somehow, we must get some control.

I do not have an easy answer, there are many, including my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—I am sorry that she is not in her place because I thought that she was developing a great interest in fishing matters, but clearly it is transient—and some representative members of the industry, who are somehow giving the impression that there is an easy solution.

One of the easy solutions, of course, is to withdraw from the common fisheries policy just like that. I wish that somebody could tell us how that could be achieved. If somebody could convince me that it was possible unilaterally to withdraw from it I would be tempted by that prospect. As the amendment tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) makes clear, I want a fundamental recasting of the arrangements, be they inside or outside the common fisheries policy, to return a much greater element of control of the fish stocks around our coast to our own Government. That is what I want to see. What I am not convinced about is how on earth we can achieve that objective.

I deal now with decommissioning. In a way, the amount of money that my right hon. Friend squeezed out of the Treasury is a personal embarrassment. He was kind enough to inform me and my hon. Friends the Members for Cornwall, South-East and for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) of the amount when we met him a couple of nights ago. Quite frankly, I was taken aback by the size of what is now available. It will help enormously. Fishermen come to my surgery—one came last Saturday—and say, "We want to leave the industry. We want to take decommissioning." It will help, but it is not the answer to the fundamental problem that we and the industry will face in future or to what it faced before. We are all aware of the problem. How on earth can we have a policy that conserves stocks and cuts back on effort on a fair basis?

Again, I return to the wretched deal in Brussels. It is not a fair deal for our fishermen, whatever is said about it. No one can convince me for one second that somehow there is some means to ensure that only the 40 Spanish vessels—I wish that there was not a single Spanish vessel—allowed into some of the waters of the box will fish there. I am convinced that more than 40 Spanish vessels will fish from time to time and probably most of the time in that huge area of water.

If there are more vessels, there will be an increase in fishing effort. The pretence that has been put up that somehow there will be no overall increase in fishing effort is laughable. Of course there will be. The Spanish, of course, are notorious for breaking every known rule in the book. They will cheat and cheat again. Of course there will be an increase in effort. I know what will happen. Next year or the year after, the scientists will come forward and say, "We are sorry but the stocks have been under still more pressure. They are reaching danger states and therefore there must be a cut in quota." Although my hon. Friend the Minister of State is correct that, as part of the deal, we still have our full quota, it will be cut and cut again. That follows as surely as night follows day.

That is the prospect for the deal and for the future of the common fisheries policies. It fills me not with apprehension but with utter dismay. I am bitter about what happened in Brussels on the night of 22 December, but if I am bitter, imagine how my constituents who fish from Newlyn feel. Their anger is justifiable.

That leads me to one conclusion, and I shall finish on this note of deep, deep sadness. I applaud what Ministers have done. I am very grateful indeed for the way in which they have tried to accommodate me, my colleagues and other hon. Members, but I am going to vote against the Government tonight. I have come to that conclusion after a lot of thought. There is an illogicality in my voting. I know that it will not change the situation, but at some point individual Members of Parliament must make a stand on an issue. I can only say that, for my part—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

8.24 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): It would be normal courtesy in the House to welcome the Minister on his first appearance at the Dispatch Box to speak in a fisheries debate, but I am afraid that the best that I can say is that it would have been better if he had stayed away, because he said only two things, the first being that abstention is an honourable stance. I should tell him that quite often people who stand in the middle of the road get run down. Secondly, he said that it was a good deal, a marvellous negotiating position, but we could not bring ourselves to vote for it. That is hardly an honourable position for the Minister to take.

We are debating an industry that is in an extremely precarious position. It is bound to be. It is an industry that seeks to harvest a crop, yet there is virtually no control over the stocks that are available. We already have evidence from scientists who say that the cod and haddock are under an even greater threat than we thought. They

now suggest that there may have to be as much as a 30 per cent. cut in the total allowable catch. That is a quick synopsis of what the scientists are saying.

The trouble is that there is no stability. The scientists tell us one year that the stocks are under dire pressure. A couple of years later they come back and say that we can double the quota. Then they say again that the stocks are under dire pressure. The problem is that none of us can afford to ignore their advice. We have the dreadful precedent of what happened in the Canadian cod grounds.

The fishing industry, not unnaturally, does not accept all that the scientists say. I believe that it accepts what they say about cod, but not about haddock. We are in the dreadful position of not knowing where we are on that matter. The industry needs stability, but it does not get it, because the common fisheries policy undergoes crisis after crisis. It is crisis management. We have been asking for extra decommissioning money for years. We have been told that it was not necessary, that it would have to be done gradually. It really is no good the Minister coming to the House tonight and saying that he has found an extra £23 million for decommissioning—

Mr. Wallace: It is £28 million—so far.

Mr. Hughes: I apologise. Perhaps after the principled stand taken by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) it might be a bit more than that by the time that the Minister replies.

The point is that the £28 million is not being offered on any rational basis, but is being offered purely and simply to try to save the Minister's political skin. That is no way to deal with an industry and give it confidence. Its needs should be properly addressed. There was an allusion to an additional quota that the Minister had secured through swap arrangements and so on. It is no good him coming to the House and saying, "I've got a little extra fish for you lads in the north of Ireland, and a little extra fish for you lads somewhere else," on the basis that the only thing that matters in fishing is to stave off defeat in a parliamentary debate. That is what has bedeviled the Government's position.

We all know that it is a simple mathematical formula. I do not pretend to be an Einstein in mathematics, but it is a simple fact that if there are more vessels fishing in an area, the amount of fish caught will go up—the Minister says that that will not happen, and no more fish will be taken out—and, if the catch goes up, the extra amount taken out by the Spanish will have to be taken off the people who traditionally fish there. These are the only two possible consequences of the deal. He must know that.

The fundamental problem is that the common fisheries policy is now dangerously destabilised. The policy was never popular. It will never be popular, and there is no point pretending that it can be. I may not please some people by saying so, but I believe that the call to withdraw from the common fisheries policy is dangerous. It is unrealistic and those who advocate that are peddling a dangerous illusion. Whatever people might think of the past we are locked into the European Union and into the common fisheries policy.

It is no good being nostalgic and looking back to the halcyon days of an abundance of fish. My knowledge of the industry is not that of someone who has gone to sea fishing, but my father was a fisherman. Paradoxically, in the days when there was an abundance of fish in the sea, the fishing communities were pretty poorly off. The fishing communities were not great thriving areas of richness. Yes, they had a richness of culture and common community, but they were not rolling in money. We must face up to that paradox.

It beggars belief that anyone with any intelligence could support the Government's amendment. It congratulates the Government on having achieved a magnificent deal, yet the Minister could not vote for it. It has the cheek to refer to 1976, as though that was when the whole problem began. The problem with fishing began when we acceded to the Common Market. The truth of the matter is that the fishing industry was sold down the river when we joined the Common Market. No Government have so far been able to repair that damage.

The Minister says—oddly enough, in view of my strictures of him, as so often happens in speeches, I had written this before he spoke—that we need a radical review of the common fisheries policy. That is true. We do. The trouble is that, in that common fisheries policy review, we do not want the fishing industry being treated as a pawn to be exchanged in European bargaining on events which have no connection with the industry. That is how we landed in this position. The Spanish Prime Minister made threats just a couple of months ago.

In dealing with the Spanish, will the Minister tell us how much of our "fishing fleet" is owned by the Spanish? I have heard figures as high as 23 per cent. I cannot believe that it is as high as that, but it would be interesting to know the exact figure.

The difficulty that we are in is that, for the Prime Minister, Europe is either a great triumph in which he has negotiated everything that is good, or it is a place of damnation in which he wraps round his shoulders the Union Jack and plays the most nationalistic of cards.

If we are to have a proper review of the common fisheries policy, we must recognise that there are poor fishermen in Spain, as there are in other parts of the Community. There are the big boys who travel the world and rape the resources around Africa. One need only speak to the people in Africa about the Spanish to learn what the Spanish do. They could not get away with it in the Irish box and other places where they are being allowed. They come in at night, paint their numbers and names out, fish like hell and go back out again. There is a constant moving of boats. The big boys in the Spanish fleet have nothing to commend them.

A common fisheries policy review cannot be left to the European Commission or to national Governments. I say to fishermen in all parts of the United Kingdom something which I have said to them before and which they must take on board even more: such a review cannot be left just to the fishermen of individual communities.

When one talks to fishermen one discovers that they have a lot more in common with fishermen in other parts of the Community than one might at first think. The fishing industries of the European Community must make common cause with one another so as to get the policy right and to bring about stability. If that is done, there is a possibility that, with a European-wide international convention, with Governments, the Commission and fishing industries considering the industry, we might save the industry. Unless we do something radical and tackle the problem seriously, we will not have to bother about having fishing debates because there will be no industry left.

[Mr. Hughes]

8.33 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): The sad background to the debate is well known to us all. Half of it is the fact that at the time of the treaty of Spanish accession, the Spanish had a fleet one and a half times the size of the rest of the European fleet put together. Since that time, that fleet has been modernised at Britain's expense. What sickens our fishermen is not just that the Spanish will be plundering British stocks, but that they are doing it with tackle for which we have paid. That is what is so desperately depressing.

On top of that, even more depressing is the fishermen's firmly held belief that they have been betrayed, in particular by the abstention in Brussels. Whatever the long-term tactics are, whatever the advice from the Foreign Office, our fishermen cannot understand why our Ministers are not prepared to back Britain and Britain's fishermen.

The consequences of what is taking place are difficult to predict. But we know that it will be Spanish vessels in British waters. Quota hopping will continue and British stocks will be denuded. The net effect of all that will be the removal of British ships to allow Spanish expansion at our cost.

Decommissioning is something of a side issue because the reality is that, with selective tendering, most of the decommissioning money will favour Scotland and the north-east, because those are the areas of the greatest concentration of fishermen. The corollary of that is that decommissioning will have minimal effect in the south-west.

The amendment in my name and that of 24 of my hon. Friends recommends withdrawal from the common fisheries policy. That may well be impractical. It may well be an exercise in gesture politics. But, quite frankly, our fishing communities want some gesture politics. They want to be able to go back to square one, to start again and to renegotiate the deal that will force on our fishermen's children and their grandchildren a future of redundancy or bankruptcy, all now called decommissioning. They have no future in the fishing industry and it is clear whom they hold responsible for that position.

It may well be that a unilateral withdrawal from the common fisheries policy would be illegal. It may well end up in the European Court. But our fishermen would regard that as at least an opportunity to poke Europe in the eye. That is what they want and I would be happy to accommodate them if that could be achieved.

The fishing communities of Britain are not minor areas that can be set aside as part of the common agricultural policy. Once ships are taken out of our fleet, they are gone for ever. What is so desperately sickening is to see all this British effort being removed at enormous cost to our fishing communities and then to see the Spanish ships moving in on British waters. That is what sticks in the throat of all those who live in the fishing communities, not just the fishermen, but their neighbours and their friends. Ministers should not misunderstand the level of support, particularly in the south-west, that those fishing communities have.

That strikes at the very heart of our relationship with Europe. Are we really to allow the Europeans to walk all over us every single time? Are we really to abstain on every important issue because the Foreign Office has some long-term objective? If the Spanish were blackmailing us and threatening not to allow expansion of the market on 1 January, I rather wish that we had indulged in precisely the same tactics and said that we would hold up expansion unless we got precisely what was required and what was intended under the original treaty agreement.

Some serious questions have not been answered, and I am afraid that my right hon. Friend the Minister did not deal with them in his speech. Who will count the 40 Spanish ships? Who will check their catches? Who will inspect the tackle? We can be sure of one thing: it will not be the Spanish.

This will the third vote on the issue that we are discussing. Some of us were given some pretty strong assurances when we were persuaded to vote for additional money for Europe last year. That vote was followed by a second, just before Christmas. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who talked tough: he told us what he would do in Europe, and asked for our support. On that occasion, some of us who were very doubtful agreed to support him, but made it clear that if there was an abstention or he came back with a poor deal—and we urged him to stand up for Britain's interests—a price would have to be paid. That price must be paid tonight.

No one who heard the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) can have failed to be moved by his determination and his support for his constituents, and I shall be right beside him in the Division Lobby. As I have said, this is our third vote on the issue. I urge the House to take full account of what my hon. Friend said; the Government amendment takes us a vote too far.

8.41 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): There will be some interesting combinations of people in the Division Lobbies tonight. My colleagues in the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru will certainly support the motion.

Let me first say a word to the Opposition Front Bench. As has been amply demonstrated today, this is a Parliament of minorities, although admittedly some of those minorities are bigger than others. I suggest that, if Opposition Members wish to put real pressure on the Government, the official Opposition should discuss Opposition motions with spokesmen for minority parties: only if a coalition of interests in the House is determined to exert real pressure in regard to a critical issue can a Government come near defeat.

Although the ranks are now thinning in comparison with the beginning of the debate, I think that we have already heard enough to gather that there is real concern in many parts of the House. There is evidence of that from Government Front Benchers. After a campaign lasting at least five years for adequate sums for decommissioning, the amount previously available has been more than doubled. I do not think that fishermen in my constituency will miss the fact that the first tranche was announced just before the declaration of a general election, while the second tranche has been announced at a time when the Government are under fundamental pressure. There may be some advantage in a Parliament composed of minorities for the fishing communities. I must, however, echo the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris): in the context of tonight's debate, that decommissioning money will be seen as a facilitation of the process of getting one British boat out for every Spanish boat that comes in.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that he would not succumb to Danegeld in any circumstances. We now have a case of what can only be described as Spanish doubloons. There will be real resentment at the fact that, all of a sudden, £28 million has become available when the Government are under pressure from a number of quarters. I understand from our colleagues in Northern Ireland not only that they have scuppered a cross-border agreement, but that they have 1,000 tonnes of fish coming from somewhere. The night is young; who knows how much more may be offered before the last desperate stage at 10 pm?

There has been some disagreement about exactly when the pass was sold on the common fisheries policy. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food says that it was sold back in the 1970s, when he had no responsibility for the CFP, but I prefer a more recent version. I do not think that the problem was the treaty allowing accession to Spain and Portugal, which was a very limiting document; in fact, the bulk of Spanish strategy in the past two years of negotiations has been aimed at getting the Spanish out from under the limitations in the treaty. If they had not been concerned about that, they would not have had to doctor article 157—with the help of the Commission—and proceed with negotiations on an argument that, surprisingly enough, is supported only by the Spanish version of the treaty.

It is remarkable that, over the past two years, the United Kingdom Government have allowed the Spanish Government to get away with such a negotiating trick in Europe. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) asked a good question: we want to know why on earth the United Kingdom allowed the current position to arise. An agreed policy based on limited access, with certain exceptions, is now becoming a policy based on free access with certain exceptions. The Government do not understand the weakness of their negotiating position for the future; even at this stage, they do not realise how they have been outfought and outmanoeuvred by the Spanish Government over the past two years.

There is qualified majority voting, and we do not even have a minority of one; we have a minority of one half, because the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food chooses to abstain on vital votes. A former Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, the late Frank Maguire, achieved a certain notoriety because he used to transport himself from Fermanagh to abstain here in person. We now have a Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who goes to Brussels to abstain in person, such is his belief in the rightness of his negotiating position.

The situation becomes worse as things go on. We do not have an agreement, as the Minister appears unable to tell the House; we have the framework of an agreement. The real negotiations are to take place over the next year. The Spanish are now in an extremely comfortable position: if no agreement is possible in the Council of Ministers, the matter will be decided in the Commission, or it may even be left to national Governments to enforce a policy. It seems to me that the Spanish negotiators have done the difficult job in Europe, and it will be all downhill as far as the Spanish are concerned.

The reality is that the Spanish are now in the Irish box. It is not a concept for the future. Thanks to swaps from France and Belgium, they now have access to vital stocks of cod, haddock, whiting and saithe—limited quantities, admittedly, but they have legal access in areas VI and VII. No one in the fishing community seriously believes that, now that they have that access, it will be easy to prise the Spanish out of the vital waters west of Scotland.

What has happened to the CFP over the past two years has changed a position of relative stability—the cornerstone of the policy—to one of total instability. No fisherman looking at what has happened during that period can have any confidence in prospects for the future. I find it remarkable that our former circumstances—with the Spanish in a weak position at least in regard to efforts to achieve significant change before the year 2002—have changed to such an extent: the Spanish are now in a commanding position in the negotiations.

The Minister of State returns from negotiation after negotiation, Council meeting after Council meeting, saying what an enormous victory he has achieved. He describes the way in which he has managed extraordinarily radical proposals from the Commission, and says that the fishing communities should celebrate his negotiations over the past two years. I do not understand how, after so many victories at so many Council meetings, we can possibly have arrived at our present position.

I feel that it is very much up to those who have brought the negotiations to so disastrous a pass to explain to the fishermen of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland how they can possibly be protected in the current circumstances. I, for one, am certain that they will not be protected by this Government or this Parliament. I am increasingly of the belief, given the incompetence of the UK negotiations, that those fishermen can no longer be protected within the current framework of the common fisheries policy.

8.49 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): If time permitted, I would preface my remarks by offering some sympathy to the Minister who has, of course, inherited what is in effect an intractable problem. It is not a problem of his creation, nor was it created by his immediate predecessors. It has not even been created by this Government or this Parliament. The problem results from a mistake made by Parliament in 1972 which, in its anxiety to join the European Economic Community, as it was then called, agreed, among other things, to pool British waters with other countries of the EEC so as to create a common resource of all EEC waters and to accept the policy of equal access.

Subsequently, successive Fisheries Ministers have sought to create a smokescreen to disguise those facts, to bamboozle the House and the nation so as to hide the enormity of what Parliament did in 1972. Unfortunately, the Minister just happens to be in post at this time as the fog begins to clear. It is no longer possible for him to bamboozle the House with talk of multi-annual guidance quotas, total allowable catches, relative stability and the rest of it, because the day of realisation has dawned. The consequences of what was done in 1972 are unfolding, and the Spanish fishing armada is less than 12 months away.

The Government will undoubtedly try to find shelter in conservation measures, decommissioning schemes and perhaps in other measures as yet unknown. The truth is that, in 2002, quotas and TACs and all the other paraphernalia of the past 30 years will be swept away, to be replaced by those principles and policies that

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

Parliament agreed to in 1972—the establishment of a common resource with equal access for all members of the European Community to enjoy.

What that Parliament in 1972 and subsequent Parliaments could never do was create more fish; on the contrary, successive Parliaments have invited more countries to catch them. If more and more countries join the European Community, two consequences will follow. First, more and more vessels will claim a right to fish in the waters that were once British and, as many hon. Members have said, that can be done only by displacing British fishing vessels. That will happen because of the finite resources of the waters around these islands.

Secondly, the effect on our fish stocks will be disastrous because, instead of the good sense of British fishermen, greed, cheating and fraud will rapidly and savagely take hold and the seas around these islands will be hoovered clean. The House need not take just my word for it, because in a recent press report, that eminent gentleman, Sir Crispin Tickell, and his panel of environmental experts predicted that fish stocks in the North sea and the Irish sea might be on the verge of a collapse similar to that which put 18,000 fishermen in Newfoundland out of work two years ago.

What Parliament did in 1972 was wrong and this Parliament must correct that wrong. I regret, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you have not been able to see your way clear to call the amendment in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and his 24 hon. Friends. Hon. Members must not vote an important British industry into oblivion, nor must we vote an important and renewable British resource into extinction. The House must consider the consequences of trying to defend the indefensible and of trying to fool all the people all the time, and the downright hypocrisy of saying one thing and meaning or doing something entirely different. For all those reasons, I shall vote against the motion and against the amendment in the full knowledge that one day I shall have to answer to the British electorate.

8.54 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The betrayal which the agreement to admit the Spanish to our fishing waters represents is merely the outcome of a long story of neglect and indifference by Ministers towards the fishing industry. They have been happy to see that industry restructured by bankruptcy. They have never defended it from Europe and have never been prepared to take a stand in Europe, because some other issue has always been more important. They have never listened to the industry but have always listened to the Commission and to the arguments of other people in Europe.

The industry has not even been served by continuity of Ministers. Ministers with responsibility for fishing are here today and gone tomorrow. There is a constant turnover and there is nobody to whom the industry can relate. The turnover in officials is at about the same rate and the industry has lost faith in the Government and in their administration of fishing.

At the end of all that, fishing has been betrayed by allowing rapacious, cheating Spanish fleets into our waters six years ahead of time. The central question, which the Minister has not answered, is, why did the Government agree in principle to make Spain a full partner in the CFP six years ahead of time? Why was that done? It is an insane negotiating tactic to agree such a matter in principle without knowing the administrative details, because once the principle is accepted, the details can be forced, and the Spanish have been clever at doing that.

On top of that, the Minister returned to the country and the House in December and claimed a triumph. The Government claimed a wonderful achievement and successful negotiations. In a press release of 21 December, the Government said, "We shall increase the earnings of British fishermen." That is an insult to the intelligence of the industry and the House, and it has culminated now in another offer to try to buy off discontent with a kind of burial grant to get the industry to shut up by taking the money and getting out and dying.

The Government are trying to buy off the dissatisfaction that they have produced by increasing the decommissioning grant. I was delighted to see that that did not buy the votes of the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), who is an honourable Member, or for Torbay (Mr. Allason). I hope that it will not buy the votes of the other Members in the south-west. I heard a rumour that the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) would be bought off by being made a parliamentary private secretary. In fishing terms, that would be a kind of technical conservation measure. It certainly will not buy off the industry because, desperate as it is for better decommissioning grants—it wanted £75 million in the first place—it does not want the money to be paid, not as Danegeld but as a kind of Spaingeld to buy off its dissatisfaction.

People in the industry are not prepared to be bought out, decommissioned, just to make room for Spanish vessels, which is the Government's intention. The Government are giving £28 million, which they have got to give anyway for other purposes to reduce the British effort under the multi-annual guidance programme. It will not buy off discontent. The industry does not want money on that basis; it wants a proper plan for putting money into supporting and restructuring the fishing industry.

The decommissioning money is only the beginning of the rundown that is to come. The industry has to meet the multi-annual guidance programmes by 1996. The threat is that, if it does not and if, as will be the case, the agreement increases pressure on the fish stocks in the area where the Spanish will fish, the industry will face a limitation on days at sea imposed not by our Government, who have been defeated on that point, but by the Commission.

It is a bad agreement. I do not want to go into the detail, but I do want to know how it will be policed. Without a massive increase in resources for fishery protection, there is no way in which Spanish vessels can be inspected or we can prevent the practice of secret fish holds or illegal nets. We certainly cannot control landings at Spanish ports, which will not be interested in whether there has been overfishing, whether the wrong species has been caught or whether the fish are too small. The agreement cannot be effectively policed.

The Minister claimed that this is a non-bureaucratic system. However, a Grimsby fishing vessel, such as the Sparkling Line, will have to report in and out eight times just to get to fish in the Irish box. What will be the effect of the swaps given to the Spanish to fish in those waters and does that not disturb relative stability? It establishes a track record for the Spanish in those areas. If it can be

done here, in crucial waters, why cannot it be done in the North sea? If a Spanish vessel is arrested in the North sea, it will have the right of appeal to the European Court, because our courts will not deal with such an arrest. What is to keep the Spanish out of the North sea?

I want to concentrate on the main argument, which is that the fishing industry has been betrayed. It will always be betrayed—that is implicit in the common fisheries policy. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) threw away our fishing claims in his desperate desire to get into the European Community in 1972. We have always negotiated at a disadvantage—whoever else wins, we lose. That is the principle of the CFP. They have got us by the floats—or whatever those little balls are called that keep the nets afloat in the sea. We can always be overruled by majority voting. Every claim can be satisfied in our waters, from our fish. Other countries are not interested in defending those waters or those fish and they cannot be effectively policed.

Policing at the port of landing is inadequate and the shore authorities will always be on the side of their fishing fleets, not on our side. There is no adequate way to police the agreement. Fishing is never perceived to be important enough for the British Government to take an effective stance. Only the nation state can conserve and manage its own fish stocks for the inheritance of future generations of fishermen. That is the basic principle of conservation.

The Minister makes a number of tricky debating points, most of which are wrong. I wish that he would negotiate in Brussels with the vigour that he has shown in the House tonight. Instead, he is supine in the negotiations but vigorous when defending them in the House. Tricky debating points cut no ice with our fishermen. They want out of the whole business. They are fed up with being confused by counter-claims, lies and distortions about the CFP. If the Government say constantly, as the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and other Ministers do, that we cannot do this or that because of Europe, the only outcome will be violence. That is the inevitable result when people cannot get satisfaction from their own politicians and Government. There has been violence over the export of live animals and there will be violence in the fishing ports and grounds because the democratic process is being frustrated.

It is a pity that the learning process about the consequences of European control is concentrated in a Minister who thinks he knows it all. It is a consequence of impotence in the negotiations. What do we get out of the CFP? It is a diet of lies and excuses. There is no effective conservation because other countries are not policed. There is increasing pressure on shrinking stocks. All of that is building up towards the year 2002, when all the derogations and regulations will be swept away and we will be left with the naked reality of a common fisheries policy of equal access to a common stock and a regime dictated by the Commission.

We should begin to take back power and build up our strength, our position and our industry to face that eventuality. We must begin to flex our muscles. Unless Ministers are prepared to accept guidance and work with the industry rather than with the Commission, unless they begin to stand up for fishing rather than hitting it with the double whammy of no support while leaving it exposed to the depredations of the CFP, this betrayal will culminate in disaster in 2002.

9.3 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I shall begin by quoting from the January 1995 newsletter of the Clyde Fishermen's Association, of which I am proud to be an honorary vice-president. The newsletter states:

> "Many of our Members are still under the impression that, by hard negotiation, the British Government could have ensured the status quo so far as the fleets of Spain and Portugal were concerned . . . Unfortunately this was not the case."

The association—as ever—is being pragmatic. I wish that Opposition Members demonstrated similar meritorious trends. Sadly, there has never been any evidence of that since I came to this place, and I see no evidence of it tonight when I read the motion.

The motion tabled in the names of the Leader of the Opposition and his hon. Friends is as meaningful as reports of the lost cars of certain Opposition Members, and it does no credit to those who carry the label of Her Majesty's Opposition. If passed, the motion will do nothing for fishermen, other than make a futile gesture towards Europe. The motion as presented represents views that have already been argued by United Kingdom Ministers and their European counterparts, not just this evening, but at the time of the fisheries statement.

Having examined the amendments that have been tabled, I have no doubt that I shall give full support to that tabled by my right hon. Friends. Their amendment does not congratulate the Government on a magnificent deal, as has been stated by some Opposition Members. It congratulates the Government on sustaining in the negotiations exclusion zones that had previously been seen as indefensible.

I contend that my hon. Friends went to Brussels in December with a handful of twos and threes. While they did not turn up trumps, their determination and doggedness achieved more than many had expected before their departure. Once again, they found themselves in a minority of one in a majority voting situation. Once again, the majority could point to the cries of Opposition Members in the United Kingdom, who charge our negotiators with being anti-European for daring to stand against the collective will. Much has been said about the abstention, but unfortunately, without the veto, my hon. Friends' vote would have counted for naught. One does not always vote against items when the points have been won, and I accept the explanations given tonight about that abstention.

My overall view is thank heavens—for the fishermen's sake—that my hon. Friends were carrying the torch, and not people such as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), whose double standards were exposed in the House yesterday. I draw the attention of the House to an article in Aberdeen's *Evening Express* on Monday last, in which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East called on my hon. Friends the Members for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) to support the Opposition's inane motion.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East failed to recognise that the agreement keeps the Spanish and Portuguese fishermen out of the North sea, and that is a significant point for my hon. Friends from north-east constituencies. Perhaps, of course, the hon. Gentleman simply wanted to give an inaccurate impression for the media to propagate—a not unfamiliar tactic from Opposition Members.

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

I note the amendment tabled by 25 of my hon. Friends who are noted, let us say, for their strong anti-European feelings. I respect them, even if I do not always agree with them.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gallie: I only have 10 minutes in which to speak.

Sir Teddy Taylor: My hon. Friend has been very unfair.

Mr. Gallie: In that case, I shall give way.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does my hon. Friend accept that at no time have any of the 25 Members to whom he refers been anti-European? We are totally opposed to the European Community, which we believe is basically obliging a Conservative Government to impose socialism and abolish democracy.

Mr. Gallie: I accept my hon. Friend's explanation. I perhaps should have said anti-European Community, rather than anti-European.

I recognise that the fishing industry is divided on the suggestion that we withdraw from the CFP. I believe that even if it were practical to follow that course, it would do more harm than good and that our market potential would be damaged. We have heard tonight about the £450 million trade with Spain in particular. The Spanish market is important to my constituents, both fishermen and processors, and it is fundamental to the future prosperity of the fishing industry in the west of Scotland.

I have some sympathy with the amendment tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) and for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and I welcome the announcement of further decommissioning funds. I am sure that that announcement will be welcome in my part of the world and across the whole range of fishing interests in the United Kingdom.

The preservation of the Irish box is a success of which I fully approve. I find it hard to understand how any hon. Member can object to it. The exclusion zones for areas VIIa and VIIf are most welcome. The limitation of vessels is much better than anyone could have expected and, as was illustrated by my right hon. Friend the Minister, that was reflected in the Spanish press around Christmas.

It is understandable that our fishermen could hardly celebrate the results of negotiations that brought about further intrusion into our traditional fishing areas. However, if the federalists on the Opposition Benches had been conducting the negotiations, things would have been much worse.

I am concerned that the limitations in the western waters should be maintained. I should like to believe that in areas VIb, VIIc and VIIk the numbers of vessels currently restricted will be maintained far into the future. I am concerned also that the French and the Belgians have already arranged to swap quotas with the Spanish. That gives them access to cod, haddock, whiting and saithe, which will create control problems.

The key to the success of the negotiations is the manner in which they are policed. The problems felt by fishermen are based on a belief that the Spanish will cheat on quotas and landings. There must be strict control over the measurements of the quotas and the landings, and there must be scrutiny of the landings.

I should like to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister about how the detail involved in all this can be achieved. I believe that there is more detail to be put into the negotiations. There will be on-going contact. I believe that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department are the best that Britain has to conduct these negotiations and I look to their success in the future.

9.12 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) described himself as an honorary vice-president of the Clyde Fishermen's Association. I am an honorary president of that association, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I can only assume that the Clyde fishermen have demoted the hon. Member for Ayr.

Recently I spoke to Cecil Flynn of the Clyde Fishermen's Association and the president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, as well as some of my constituents who are members of the association. They expressed serious concern about the disastrous deal.

I thought that the Minister offered an offensive observation when he said that Labour Members have a Johnny-come-lately attitude to the well-being of the fishing industry and the fishing community. That is not the case. In what was no doubt a less than brilliant article that I wrote in *Tribune* 25 years ago—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): It was very good. I remember it.

Dr. Godman: In that article, I argued that there were too many fishermen chasing too few fish around seas that are the richest in the world for the harvesting of commercially valuable species. I went on to say that the common fisheries policy would need to be altered drastically before I would vote for membership of the European Community. I voted against it because the CFP did not protect our fishermen.

Twenty years ago I wrote a paper for the Scottish government year book, arguing for a common fisheries policy based inter alia on the need to protect our local fishing communities against the international nomadic fishermen who had no history of fishing in our waters, especially the fragile waters such as those around the Western Isles. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) has argued the case more recently than I have—he is a little younger.

During a debate on the European Union (Accessions) Act 1994, and in response, I think, to an intervention by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), I made the fairly safe prediction that the Norwegian people would vote against membership of the European Union. I said that on the basis of my knowledge of the fishing communities of northern Norway.

I am the son of a fisherman and a fishergirl. I know that all my life, our Administrations have failed our fishing communities and let them down badly because they—the fishing communities and the fishing industry—did not have the clout that, for example, the National Farmers Union had with the Conservatives or that some trade unions had with Labour Governments. That is perhaps

especially true of my trade union—the Transport and General Workers Union—although I hasten to add that I am not sponsored by it. Successive Governments have betrayed the interests of those communities.

My brother is right now fishing off the northern Norwegian coast. He and his family depend on this lousy, rotten common fisheries policy, which needs to be radically revised before 2002. It has to be reformed so that it protects the historic fishing communities from Cornwall to Shetland, including the Western Isles and the entire east coast of Britain, as it has not done hitherto.

Scotland has witnessed the disappearance of its steel industry and the virtual disappearance of its shipbuilding industry. We cannot allow an indigenous industry, which is part of our culture—more so, I would argue, than steel, or shipbuilding for that matter—to slip away. In the long run, we must argue for a dramatic revision of the CFP which, despite the Minister's sneering remarks about so-called regionalisation, must stress the importance of traditional fishing communities. It is possible, within a national framework, to negotiate agreements between traditional communities, such as those in the Western Isles, and the fishermen who come there from elsewhere in Scotland.

Time is short—no doubt Conservative Members are saying, "Fortunately so." In the short term, I have grave concerns about Spanish intervention and the so-called 40 vessels. The Spanish will not stick to their quotas. Has any hon. Member spoken to British crew members on Spanish trawlers? They will list the fiddles that take place when such vessels fish in our waters. My cousin, Len Whur, was the mate on a Spanish trawler and told me about the fiddles undertaken by Spanish fishing operators operating in Vigo and elsewhere. The Spanish will abuse the scheme.

I shall end by asking the Minister a question. I am sure that he agrees that the toughest policing of fishing activity in the north Atlantic is to be found in Norwegian waters. My brother told me recently that the Norwegians boarded his vessel and were on board for several hours. His employer has told him that if he is caught out due to any irregularity, he will be sacked because of the harsh sanctions that the Norwegians impose against violations of their rules. Any Scottish fisherman or any fisherman from the Humber fishing those waters will say that he has to be spot on. Our fisheries protection fleet does a great job, but I do not think that it is a match for the Spanish.

When a Spanish vessel is apprehended and the skipper is convicted in a British court, does the Minister have the power to remove the licence from such a vessel and prevent another Spanish vessel from replacing it? Were we to have that sort of power, we might go some way to diminishing the appalling consequences of the lousy deal negotiated by the Minister who is, admittedly, new to the job of fishing. I am not an expert and I have been around the industry all my life. The Government should have the power to say to any transgressor convicted in a court that he would lose his licence and no replacement vessel would be allowed into those fishing waters. Such policing is now becoming the norm in Canadian, American and Norwegian waters, and we need it here to protect what is left of the once valuable and prolific stocks.

On my first trip to sea I came back after 20 days with 30,000 stone of fish—not due to me. Now those once-rich seas are nearly bare. The industry is almost destroyed and we must introduce, in the short run, policing methods to frighten the Spanish and others into obeying the laws. Without that, the stocks will decline further. Despite what was said in the Spanish newspapers, the Spanish will laugh all the way to the bank at the expense of our fishermen. In the long term we need a radical revision of the CFP. In the short term we need policing as tough as that in place in Norwegian waters.

9.22 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I shall detain the House for only a few short minutes this evening.

This debate, to give it the most charitable gloss, is synthetic. It is fraudulent and mischievous because it is all about gestures. I shall immediately pick up on the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason)—I take gesture politics more seriously than he does. It is serious becasue gesture politics is callous. Hon. Members in both the major Opposition parties and some of my hon. Friends seek to reinforce the illusion prevalent in fishing communities that my right hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Minister of State did anything but go two thirds of the way towards a negotiated package in Brussels before Christmas—which, although not ideal, they could have improved on in some way.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) has moved a motion that plays second fiddle to scare stories about through ticketing from a party whose leadership has consistently ascribed little or no status to fishing as an industry that affects the long-term livelihood of those communities who depend on that way of life. I absolve the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) of guilt in the matter.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East will need no reminding this evening—it is possible that some of his colleagues will—of what happened between 1974 and 1979 when he was responsible for such matters. In contrast to the cheap currency and soundbites of Opposition rhetoric today, the Labour Government of that period achieved no change to any of the mechanisms in place then, not even at the margins. They did not even have the excuse of qualified majority voting to fall back on. It is intellectually fraudulent to suggest that Labour would or could have fared any better around that pre-Christmas table than my right hon. Friend the Minister.

In the cold light of day, we know that it was not a path on which either of the Opposition parties would have set foot. In 1985, the Labour party—again, I absolve the hon. Member for Great Grimsby—supported the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Community. Knowing the full implications of that decision, it hid from the reality and palmed off the fishing communities. The Labour party failed to frame one policy or even mention fishing in its election manifesto of 1992. The issue was scrubbed from its European manifesto this year and it merits only a few lines in the Labour party's latest countryside policy paper entitled "In Trust for Tomorrow". Care, commitment and concern—tell me.

The Liberal party shared in the sclerosis of ideas between 1974 and 1979 by way of the shabby Lib-Lab pact. Its leader, the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), is committed to getting rid of our national veto and stripping all protection from those communities for which the Liberals shed their crocodile tears.

[Mr. Sebastian Coe]

That is what lies behind the Opposition's motion tonight—not policies intellectually argued and rigorously applied but cheap gestures which demean this Chamber and insult the intelligence of fishing communities the length and breadth of the Union.

I am even less prepared to take lectures from the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) in this Chamber or to listen to the waterfall of rubbish that she speaks on the subject elsewhere. I suggest that her time would be spent more fruitfully thumbing nervously through local authority planning guidelines.

The Minister should be in no doubt about the concern and understandable frustration which we feel at the hand of cards—our wretched history and the collective memory, often conveniently dimmed in this place—that the Minister took to Brussels. Although I recognise his notable achievements and the compromises reached during the negotiations, I regret that—even in the full knowledge of defeat—he did not vote against access by Spanish vessels to Cornish waters.

I am relieved and very pleased about the extra money allocated for decommissioning which my right hon. Friend has announced tonight. It more than meets the expectations of fishing organisations and it is a sensible response to many of the underlying issues that have been well discussed in this place on other occasions.

The truth is that this debate is about visiting the historic sins of the parents on the children. Those parents signed away many of our traditional fishing rights, either in ignorance or by collusion. It is those parents—many of whom are on the Opposition Benches tonight—who have much to answer for. I cannot support their motion.

9.27 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I wish to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food a few questions on behalf of fishermen in my constituency. Many details of the deal are still unclear, and we do not know how badly it will impact on many sectors of the fishing industry on the west coast of Scotland. However, the fishermen have good reason to fear that its effects will be very grim indeed.

In his opening remarks, the Minister made great play of the fact that the Spanish fleet has a very small proportion of the fishing quotas available on the west coast— he mentioned the figure of 2 per cent. However, that does not take into account the latest manoeuvres within the French and Belgian industries which have made significant quota swaps with the Spanish. The importance of that is not just that the total owned by the Spanish has been increased but that many of the boats which otherwise would have no quotas whatsoever and no right to fish will now have some nominal quota and, therefore, can engage in the duplicitous practices for which the Spanish are notorious.

Will the Minister also spend a little time on the steep increase in catches recorded by Spanish flag of convenience vessels fishing against the British quota? In species such as nephrops, monkfish and plaice and all total allowable catch species, foreign landings have increased by between 50 per cent. and 100 per cent. It is clear, therefore, that flag of convenience vessels are biting deeper into British quotas. That causes great concern, particularly given the context of Spanish access, and it is important that the Minister says something about those increases.

Finally, I congratulate my hon. Friends on having called the debate. It is notable that it was not the Government who found time for such an important debate; my hon. Friends pushed forward the interests of British fishermen and are defending them vigorously.

9.30 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): We have had an important debate tonight which has demonstrated many of the problems that the fishing industry faces at the present time. Many of those problems go back to the early negotiation of the Common Market and demonstrate that, although the Government may point to failures in the past, they have had 16 years to do something about them.

We have had 16 years of policy failure in fishing—in particular, the failure of the original CFP agreement in 1983. That agreement sold out our fishing industry and left open the door of opportunity exploited by the Spanish and Portuguese in the recent accession agreements.

The great tragedy is that the CFP has been severely discredited, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) pointed out. There is a growing movement demanding the radical and unrealistic unilateral termination of the CFP, as the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) mentioned. It has to be recognised, however, that, given the discontent within the industry, calls to withdraw from the CFP are hardly surprising. It is clear that there is a need for urgent action to be taken to rectify the current position. That is the main thrust of our motion tonight and it is deadly serious.

It is an insult to the fishing industry for the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) to describe the debate as bogus. The fishing industry wanted the issue debated. The Government could have made a statement and provided an opportunity for a debate, but the Opposition have taken the matter so seriously that we have devoted one of our Supply days to it.

Those of us who represent the fishing industry and ports know the strength of feeling on this issue and the risk that is posed to sustainable management by discrediting our position, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) pointed out. Not only is the CFP discredited, but all that is positive about the European ideal is also discredited when people have no confidence in agreements from Brussels.

Whatever gloss the Minister may put on it, Spanish boats are fishing in United Kingdom waters and establishing track records where they had no previous entitlement. At the same time, the British fleet faces a reduction through decommissioning.

In a letter recently, the Minister of State reassured fishermen that there would be no new measures to control efforts as long as effort on fish stocks did not increase in the area and in the former Spanish box. Is that really likely, with the admission of an extra 40 Spanish vessels in the Irish box?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) pointed out, the Spanish have a poor record in abiding by rules. There is also need for effective enforcement, which does not appear in the new deal, but to suggest that there will be no increase in effort

by allowing the Spanish in is about as likely as the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) eloping with Jacques Delors and opening a bijou French restaurant in the Dordogne. According to the Minister, the deal was apparently approved by Lord Tebbit. It seems that the Government must meet a new standard—the Tebbit test—before a deal may be regarded as acceptable. It makes one wonder who makes foreign policy in the Conservative party.

We are serious when we ask for a review of the CFP. There will be an opportunity in 2002, or even sooner—as the right hon. Gentleman interestingly said. Perhaps the Minister of State will expand on that comment. Will there be an early opportunity to review the policy? There is no reason why Britain cannot renegotiate a better deal for its fishing industry. The Norwegians, led by their fisheries Minister, Mr. Olsen, secured a much better deal as part of accession negotiations. Following its referendum, Norway is not to pursue membership of the EU, but it secured a better deal than the British industry when this country joined the CFP in 1983—of course, Mr. Olsen was a Labour fisheries Minister.

The right hon. Gentleman stated that much of the deal is still to come and to be agreed. We would like more details. Will the Minister confirm that the concept of the standard vessel measurement is incorporated in the deal? How does it compare with our current measurement of vessel capacity units in calculating effort? More importantly, will the Minister comment on whether the deal leaves the door open for standard vessel days to be introduced as a control measure? We would welcome his comments also on remarks made by the right hon. Gentleman about introducing market-driven controls. Are the Government considering introducing individual transferable quotas on the New Zealand model?

We welcome the extra £28 million to boost the decommissioning scheme which was announced tonight. It is regrettable that such announcements are forced from the Government by an Opposition motion and threats from Conservative Back Benchers. I calculate that 27 Government Members signed amendments to our motion, which means more than £1 million per wavering voter—that puts £1,000 a question in the shade. Perhaps that should be declared to the Nolan committee. A few words have also been said to our Ulster friends as part of the Government's package of measures.

Decommissioning is a serious issue. It is an important part of effort control and deals with overcapacity. Far from there being no policy statement in our manifesto, in 1992 we devoted a specific policy statement to the matter, "Marine Harvest: Labour's Policy for a sustainable Fishing Industry."

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): It was produced on a word processor.

Mr. Morley: I do not deny it. It was produced on a rather cheap word processor, but in 1992 the Labour party did not have the benefit of donations from dodgy foreign millionaires. I admit that our materials were not quite up to the standard of the Conservative party. Nevertheless, some of the policies presented in that document have been adopted by the Government.

We are moving towards a more realistic and effective decommissioning scheme, but it has been a slow process. It would have been better for the industry if the money had been front loaded and made available three years ago rather than now. Will the Minister confirm that £8 million of the £28 million announced tonight is from the initial scheme?

Mr. Jack *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Morley: The Minister says not, which I accept. However, it is worth comparing the scheme with others on which the Government have spent money, such as rail privatisation. Having lavished £600 million on consultancy fees, the Government could have paid fishermen to stay at home and order their fish from Harrods, in addition to financing a more effective decommissioning scheme.

The hon. Members for St. Ives and for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) have accepted our motion, and we agree with the main points of their amendment; we think them sensible. We are only sorry that the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne did not add his name to their amendment, but he can still join those of his hon. Friends—and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason)—who have said that they intend to vote with us tonight.

The common fisheries policy is facing a crisis. We need to demonstrate to the industry that we share its concerns and recognise its problems, which fishermen feel are beyond their control. We must also show that this country will stand up for its industry in the same way as the Spanish— whatever one might say about them—have done in skilfully negotiating on behalf of their country. We should be able to get deals for our fishermen in the same way as the Norwegians have been capable of getting deals for theirs. We need a Government who are prepared to stand up for the industry in the same way as other Governments do for theirs.

Some Conservative Members have shown principle and have shown concern for the fishing communities that they represent. A common thread running through this debate has been the degree of concern felt for our fishing industry. That is why we should all take it seriously.

All Conservative Members who are worried about the impact of the CFP, and about how this deal will affect our industry, all Conservative Members who want to stand up for the British fishing industry and to give it a sustainable future, should vote with us in the Lobby tonight.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): This has been a debate of powerfully expressed views, of strong emotions and—from many Conservative Members—of sound common sense. I pay tribute first to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), who made a thoughtful and considered speech. I defend him against the cheap jibe from the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who accused my hon. Friend of allowing his opinions to be bought by the Government. My hon. Friend has served with distinction for the past six months as a parliamentary private secretary and he has shown more concern for his constituents in the fishing industry than have many Opposition Members for theirs.

My hon. Friend's excellent and realistic speech brought a note of realism to our consideration of these matters. His was an honest statement; he spoke of the difficulties experienced by many in the south-west, and I listened carefully to what he had to say.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

Whatever the final arrangements for Spain and Portugal may be, playing by the rules will clearly be central to them. We take that very seriously. Once the final details are settled, I assure the House that my right hon. Friend and I will examine all the implications for enforcement. If the common fisheries policy is to have real credibility and be seen to work, enforcement must be effective. There will be no no-go areas in the Community in respect of the inspection of Spanish vessels, to ensure that they play by the rules.

I have already sent an invitation to the new fishing Commissioner, asking her to the United Kingdom for talks. I hope to persuade her to come and meet some real fishermen from the south-west of England. When she comes, I shall put enforcement at the top of my agenda, because it is central to confidence in these policies.

By contrast with my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne, who dealt with real issues in the real world, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) asked us yet another list of questions. Besides the importance of enforcement, the other obvious factor in this debate has been the total lack of any clearly stated policy on fishing from the Opposition parties.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He knows that I have been generous in the past, but this time I have a great deal of information with which to educate him on the subject of fisheries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) made a gritty speech. He was right—*[Interruption.]* It was certainly a deal stronger in its content and better thought out than some of the pap that we heard from Opposition Members. My hon. Friend was right in emphasising what I can describe only as one of the most shambolic performances that I have ever heard from an Opposition Front Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). I shall return to the hon. Gentleman for special treatment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr was right to emphasise the importance to all our fishermen—especially those in the west country—of the market in Spain, France and wider Europe. If we are to have the benefits of a common market and a common fisheries policy, there must be a two-way process. We have the gains that come from that market and that policy. Those who advocate that we should leave the CFP set out a false agenda and put at risk the very market that gives a livelihood to our fishermen throughout the land.

My hon. Friend mentioned enforcement. I hope that he takes assurance from what I have said about that.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) made a thoughtful and moving speech. I take the opportunity of thanking him for his personal kindness and courtesy, which he has demonstrated throughout in dealing with me over these issues. It is—*[Interruption.]* The ribald laughter of Opposition Members does a great disservice to my hon. Friend, who has laboured long with the difficulties of his constituents and the issues now before us.

I have put to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives on many occasions the arguments that my right hon. Friend the Minister and I have deployed—I think with skill—in negotiations in Europe. My hon. Friend knows only too well the difficulties that we face. He set us a challenge, and I responded to it. He asked us whether we could keep the Spanish out of the North sea, the Bristol channel and the Celtic sea. My right hon. Friend, after tremendously complex negotiations, achieved two of the three targets.

My hon. Friend asked us whether we could restrict the activities of Spain in the remainder of the Irish box. We did. We restricted it to 40 vessels. It is relevant to refer to the report of the Select Committee on Agriculture on fishing, which was published in August 1993. In its report, the Committee drew the attention of the House to the fact that before Spain joined the Common Market it fished in the western waters from which it has since been barred with a fleet of 460 vessels. When Spain joined the Community, it was constrained to not 460 vessels but a basic list of about 300. Of that list, only 150 could fish at any one time.

The negotiations that my right hon. Friend and I conducted have restricted Spain to 40 vessels in the same area. To answer the question, "What happens in the other area?", though the Spanish fishing effort that can be deployed will have to be in ratio to the catch quotas that are available in the areas, the idea that there will be a limitless Spanish free-for-all is not possible as a result of the negotiations. That is what I say to those who denigrate the CFP.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives has stood on the quayside at Newlyn, no doubt, and agonised with the fishermen about the problems that we have been discussing. I hope that even in these last minutes of the debate my hon. Friend will understand that we negotiated with the needs of the fishermen in his constituency and of all the fishermen of the United Kingdom in mind in our deliberations at Brussels. We fought extremely hard to the end. There is still work to do. Whatever my hon. Friend decides to do at the end of the day, I can assure him that we shall continue to be dedicated to the interests of west country fishermen and of others in our proceedings.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jack: Not for the moment.

My hon. Friends the Members for Torbay (Mr. Allason) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) have associated themselves with emotional speeches over whether they thought the CFP had served the country well and whether we have had protection from it. I hope that in my remarks, with particular reference to the number of Spanish vessels, my hon. Friends will see quite clearly that the common fisheries policy has provided a defence for the interests of our fishermen.

Let us examine for a moment the situation if we did not have that policy—the dream world of a return to the 200-mile limit, of little no entry signs at the front of the English channel or half way out in the Irish sea. That would not stop anybody. There would also have to be negotiations with others who have traditional rights to fish in those waters. What power would we have to stop them? None. It is an illusion, a false promise. For the hon. Member for Great Grimsby to associate himself with such an argument does his interest in the fishing industry a grave disservice.

My hon. Friends who represent constituencies in the west country know, as do other Conservative Members, that we have responded to the needs of the fishing industry. Many hon. Members have talked about the fishermen's livelihood. My right hon. Friend, in winning the additional resources for decommissioning, has made it possible to bring into better balance the catching capacity of our fleets with the possibilities presented to them, so that those with old vessels and those who wish to retire from the industry can take their capacity out with money in their pockets and leave for the rest of the fishermen a livelihood to enjoy for the future. That is true investment in the future of the fishing industry and shows which party in the House has the interests of the industry at heart.

I am also aware that my hon. Friends the Members for Torbay and for Ludlow are concerned about rule breaking. I give them the assurance that I and my right hon. Friend will make it one of our principal priorities to ensure that the common fisheries policy is properly and fully enforced. I share their concerns. I cannot argue to the House that it is a policy with credibility unless it can be enforced with rigour, transparency and openness. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay that, if he had had a chance to examine the achievement of the negotiation, he would know that we secured from the Commission the promise of a report for the first time to shine a light of transparency into the activity of Community inspectors. We will know where they go and, more importantly, where they do not go, and challenge it.

Dr. Michael Clark: My hon. Friend is talking about Spain obeying rules. Does he recall that, in the previous debate, I reminded him that Spain had tried to link the extension of the European Community to access to the Irish box? I suggested to him that we should link access to the Irish box to Spain behaving properly with regard to the Gibraltar border. Did he take that up with the Foreign Secretary? Was it discussed with Spain? Will Spain obey the rules here, too?

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is aware of my hon. Friend's point. I have already rechecked the situation in case my hon. Friend, having studied the debate last time, raised it again. He will understand that it is not directly a debate about foreign affairs, but I understand the point that he makes about linkage. Indeed, the Government are maintaining pressure on the Spanish to reduce the inconvenience caused on the border by the overzealous border controls to which my hon. Friend refers. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised that issue with his counterpart on 19 December and those secondary restrictions have now been lifted. I shall emphasise that point again to my right hon. Friend.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow—I hope that he is listening—that as a result of my right hon. Friend's negotiations, the armada that he saw in his mind's eye will not be able to enter the waters off our western shores. We stopped it; we stopped the Spanish going into the Irish sea; we stopped them going into the English channel. We restricted them to 40 in the remainder of the Irish box and we will constrain, by our negotiation, the effort of Spain in the remainder of that water. They will be limited. There will be no free-for-all on that particular matter.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jack: No. The hon. Gentleman has had more than adequate time and his hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) had all my intervention time in the previous debate.

I shall now deal with the speech by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby. It shows that with no policy the Labour party is a divided party on Europe and on the common fisheries policy. At least the hon. Gentleman is consistent with his own line and, unlike the Opposition Front-Bench Members, has some ideas. I do not agree with those ideas. His is an anti-Community stance. He makes no secret of that. The hon. Gentleman nods in agreement. I say to him and other hon. Members that to suggest in any way that an easy solution to the problems is to come out of the common fisheries policy is a false agenda. We are signatories to the European Union. We cannot leave the common fisheries policy. It is better that we work within it for change.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: The argument is simply that unless Ministers have the guts to stand up for Britain and fight for a better deal, the fishing industry will turn against the common fisheries policy, as is shown by the rising strength of Save Britain's Fish throughout Britain.

Mr. Jack: If you are peddling the Save Britain's Fish line, you are doing a grave disservice to Britain's fishermen. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: I am not calling order. The hon. Gentleman is referring to me personally. I am sure he means the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

Mr. Jack: The hon. Member for Great Grimsby is doing a grave disservice to the British fishing industry if he is peddling that particular line. The policy that he advocates is a non-starter. He would do far better to turn his intellectual fire power on to reform, joining in with ideas for the working party which my right hon. Friend has established. His line is clearly incompatible with that of his Front-Bench spokesmen. I do not know whether they have a line, but it is incompatible with the views expressed by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang).

I remind the hon. Member for Great Grimsby that on 10 December 1985 the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), said:

> "We welcome the accession of Spain and Portugal. It is the right move for the Community and for Spain and Portugal. We welcome it because we recognise the merits of those two new democracies joining the rest of Europe and facing Europe's problems with us. The Opposition do not welcome accession blindly, ignorantly or oblivious of the difficulties and anxieties."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1985; Vol. 88, c. 883.]

The Opposition knew what they were letting themselves in for and they cannot run away from those responsibilities now. They had the opportunity to change the common fisheries policy.

[Mr. Jack]

On 15 July 1982, the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, now Lord Walker, said:

"I wish to remind the Opposition that they decided when they renegotiated the terms of our entry they did not wish to renegotiate the terms on fishing."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 1982; Vol. 27, c. 1186.]

That is the policy that we are following. Lord Walker negotiated improvements in the common fisheries policy with no help from Opposition Members.

I come now to remarks made by the hon. Gentleman and others on a technical question about the North sea. I owe the hon. Gentleman an answer on that. He asked whether swaps could allow the Spanish into that area. Theoretically, Spain could swap, but she could not fish those quotas as she has no right of access to the North sea. That is a crucial part of the agreement. My right hon. Friend secured an absolute barrier to Spain coming into the North sea. There is no mention of that in the Opposition's motion.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East gave a shambolic performance. It contained no positive ideas. We are none the wiser about the Opposition's fishing policy. The hon. Gentleman showed scant knowledge of what happened in the negotiation. He asked about allies. We had nearly every member state on our side in the September Fisheries Council in order to turn back the Commission's over-bureaucratic and complex proposals.

I remind the hon. Gentleman what Labour Members of the European Parliament did to that proposal. When it came to the vote in the European Parliament for the over-complex, bureaucratic system of standard vessel days, about which the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe asked, Labour Members of the European Parliament voted in favour of that proposal, which would have put an unacceptable burden on our fishing industry. They voted against proposals agreed by his own representatives in the European Parliament's fishing committee to modify those proposals to the benefit of the United Kingdom's fishermen.

That shows the duplicity of and divide in the Labour party and the opportunism of its approach to the common fisheries policy. We worked hard to get the necessary alliances together in order to fight for and win the concessions that we did. We kept Spain out of the North sea, the Irish sea and the Bristol channel and we limited Spanish vessels.

Tonight is not the night for my hon. Friends to give smug satisfaction to socialists whose parliamentary predecessors did nothing properly to safeguard the future of the common fisheries policy for the United Kingdom.

I have mentioned the European Parliament. Tonight is not the night to vote for the "Brussels knows best" party, which would have no stomach for the fight for our fishermen. It was Conservatives who stopped the Spanish free-for-all; it was Conservatives who brought extra resources to the common fisheries policy; it is Conservatives who are fighting for an industry of brave men with proud traditions. Conservative Members have a proud tradition of fighting socialism: let us do that in the Lobby tonight.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 312.

Division No. 40] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell

Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas

Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 301.

Division No. 41] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John

Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hasehurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Farnham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John

Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House takes note of the agreement of the Council of Fisheries Ministers, congratulates the Government on securing the exclusion of Spanish fishing vessels from the Irish Sea and the Bristol Channel, the limiting of Spanish fishing within the rest of the Irish Box to 40 vessels simultaneously and the inclusion of special restrictions on Spanish vessels within the Box West of Scotland; notes that the agreement does not call into question the continued exclusion of Spanish vessels from the North Sea and the principle of relative stability; recognises this outcome represents a major improvement for United Kingdom fishermen compared to the original Commission proposals, the negotiation of which was made more difficult by the failure to win Hague Preferences for South West English fishing communities in 1976; welcomes the undertaking the Government secured from the Commission to provide annual reports on the findings of Commission Fisheries Inspectors; notes the Government's current annual expenditure of some £25 million on fisheries enforcement and welcomes the Government's commitment to ensure effective policing of the agreement; welcomes the Government's success in extending the benefits of the EC's structural programmes to areas of the United Kingdom dependent on fishing; notes that the Government are also spending some £17 million per annum on fisheries research and monitoring and some £5 million per annum on other forms of assistance to the fisheries sector; notes the Government's current substantial programme of decommissioning expenditure; and welcomes its commitment to provide further programmes in 1996-97 and 1997-98.

James Wilkinson

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.32 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving please do so quietly? We still have business to conduct in the Chamber.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am most grateful for the opportunity to raise some detailed concerns about the case of James Wilkinson, a three-year-old boy in my constituency who suffers from a rare syndrome termed Ondine's syndrome. As well as drawing the attention of the House to some specific problems relating to the funding of James's care, I want to press the Minister over my concern about the way in which proposed changes to the funding of the Wakefield health authority will impact on James's personal situation and those of other constituents with health problems.

James was born on 20 April 1992. He was Ann and Gary Wilkinson's first child. He weighed 6lb 13oz at birth and appeared, at first, to be normal and healthy, except for a slight problem with his breathing. Within minutes of his birth he was rushed into intensive care and, despite rigorous tests, his condition baffled doctors for some considerable time.

James was transferred from maternity care in Wakefield to the Clarendon wing of Leeds general infirmary and, subsequently, to the North Staffordshire general hospital in Stoke-on-Trent for highly specialised care. He was diagnosed as suffering from Ondine's syndrome, a condition which affects only a handful of people—I believe about eight—in the whole of Britain. Ondine's syndrome is characterised by hyperventilation and shallow or slow breathing during sleep. It is believed to be caused by an abnormality in the automatic control of respiration. The respiration centre does not react adequately to carbon dioxide levels in the blood in the way that is necessary to maintain normal breathing. It has been suggested that this may be due to lesions of the high spinal chord or brain stem. The condition is named after Ondine, a character in Greek mythology who allegedly caused a mortal who loved her to sleep for ever.

James Wilkinson spent the first 18 months of his life in hospital. His parents travelled a round trip of 200 miles to see him each weekend before he was able to return to Yorkshire. They had to adjust to a regime of monitoring his condition 24 hours a day. When he became weary or fell asleep he was attached to a ventilation mask which maintained his breathing.

Mrs. Wilkinson told me recently that, shortly after James's diagnosis, she was advised by another family facing the same tragic problem to seek the support of her Member of Parliament in the anticipated struggles to enable James to be brought up in as normal an environment as possible in the family home. She and her husband contacted my constituency office during summer 1992, and my constituency researcher and I have been involved in making representations on their behalf, particularly with regard to James's care at home, since that time.

I know that Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson were very frustrated by the length of time that it took to secure an adequate package of care for James at home. They went to the extent of writing to the Secretary of State for Health about their concerns. I do not want to dwell on that point, other than to say that I think that the family were rightly aggrieved at the way in which they saw James becoming institutionalised because of inability to arrange his domiciliary care.

The Minister will be aware that I also wrote to his Department on 20 July 1993 outlining my concerns on that point. No doubt he will have seen a copy of the reply that I received, dated 31 July 1993, from the then Minister for Health, the right hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney).

James eventually went home to his family on 5 October 1993, the ventilation equipment necessary for his care having been installed in an extension of the Wilkinson's house constructed to meet his specific needs. The current care package involves 24-hour nursing cover, and the family also have the support of a home carer from the local authority social services department for six hours each week.

Last summer, Wakefield health authority invited me to attend a discussion about James's case. I was made aware of the difficulties that the authority faces in funding, on an annual basis, the care that he requires. As a means of possibly reducing costs, it was suggested that Mrs. Wilkinson might undertake some of the monitoring of James's condition which was carried out by nurses, with social services caring for James's sister, Harriet, who I believe is about two years old.

The family—rightly, in my view—resisted that proposal. Mrs. Wilkinson is firmly of the opinion that her daughter should be cared for by her own parents and not by a substitute. Their views on the matter were endorsed by the family's general practitioner, Dr Brain, in a letter to me dated 29 September 1994. Nevertheless, I appreciate the difficulties faced by the Wakefield health authority, which finds its budgetary arrangements skewed because of the resourcing required to meet one person's needs. I ask the Minister to consider that point tonight because his response in a letter to me in November, following my written representations on the issue, did not address in any way the difficulties faced both by the Wilkinson family and by Wakefield health care.

I pay a sincere tribute tonight to Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson and to their wider family for the care that they have given James in such tragic circumstances. It is completely unacceptable that they should feel constantly subject to the possibility of a reduced package of care because Wakefield health care's budgetary difficulties in funding such care are not taken into account by the Government in the allocation of resources.

It cost Wakefield health authority nearly £260,000 for James's care as an in-patient at the North Staffordshire hospital and the Leeds general infirmary and a further £147,000 for in-patient care and home care during the last financial year. Those figures do not include equipment costs, which are in the region of £32,500.

It costs Wakefield health authority around £102,000 per annum to fund James's care at home. Wakefield health authority pointed out to me that, if used in another way, that funding could purchase 17 coronary artery bypass grafts, 45 hip replacements or 132 cataract operations. In other words, the health needs of a significant number of

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

my constituents and, indeed, yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are not being met because the Government's allocation of funds to Wakefield health care do not take into account the manner in which James's care skews its existing budget.

I want to make absolutely clear, knowing Wakefield people as well as I do—I was born in Wakefield and have lived there all my life—that I doubt whether there is one person in Wakefield whose health needs might otherwise be met, who would resent those resources being spent on James's care, but I suspect that many of them will feel as I do that it is wrong that such expenditure is not taken into account by the Government in the calculation of local funding requirements.

Last April, Wakefield community health council wrote to local Members of Parliament for the Wakefield district suggesting that central funding might be ring-fenced to cope with such special cases from a national point of view. At a meeting on Monday this week, council members agreed to table a motion to the annual conference of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales later this year urging the Department of Health to fund from a central source the extra resources that are required to meet the cost of extensive funding for individual patients needing specialised care. The motion points out that this position will become even more uncertain with the impact of total purchasing by GP fundholders.

Before I conclude, there is another factor with a bearing on James Wilkinson's case that I want to raise with the Minister. I have given him notice of the points that I intend to raise tonight. As he will know, on 21 October last year, the national health service executive published new guidance on the distribution of resources in the national health service, following a review of the methodology of the allocation of revenue funding.

At its December meeting, Wakefield health authority considered a paper from its director of finance and information on the outcome of the review in respect of its impact on the local budget. The paper suggested that the new formula changed the district health authority's distance from its target allocation quite dramatically, as it is allegedly overfunded at present by some £7 million per annum. The 4.9 per cent. variance is the biggest percentage variance in the new Northern and Yorkshire region, and is obviously of great concern in terms of its implications for funding the future care of patients such as James Wilkinson.

I will not expand on matters beyond the scope of this debate, but I fear that the 1991 consensus on which the new formula is based pre-dates many of the employment and health implications of the coal closure programme that devastated Wakefield. You more than anybody, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be aware of the point that I am making. I fear also that the population age profile showing that Wakefield has a relatively small population of elderly people fails to take account of the fact that local demand for health care shows that the total requirement for resources has not reduced. The same amount of health care is being used over a shorter life span.

The implications of those changes add to existing pressure on funding the current care package needed by James Wilkinson and his family. The Government must address the understandable anxieties of the Wilkinson family and of Wakefield health authority.

It would be wrong not to express on behalf of the Wilkinson family their thanks to all those who have supported them since James was born. They are particularly grateful to the current nursing team and to the home carer from a local authority social services department who visits every week. The family are also most appreciative of the support of their general practitioner, Dr. Brain, and of colleagues from the same practise.

The Wilkinson family are bravely facing up to an extremely difficult situation. They would welcome assurance that the support that they will need in future will not be threatened because Wakefield health authority's specific funding problems have not been taken into account by the Government.

10.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on securing this Adjournment debate on Ondine's syndrome and the case of James Wilkinson. I listened with great interest to his remarks. Thankfully, Ondine's syndrome is a rare condition, but I appreciate the support that the hon. Gentleman has given the Wilkinson family and the concern that he feels. I know that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House join me in conveying our sympathy to members of James Wilkinson's family, whose lives have inevitably been turned upside down by his condition. The illness of any loved one is always traumatic and difficult to come to terms with, and especially so with one so young—in this case, a two-year-old child.

The NHS accords a high priority to children's health services. In 1991, a good practice guide on the welfare of children and young people in hospital was issued to health authorities. It made a number of important points, including—this is relevant in this case—the point that children should be treated at home wherever possible, with help from primary care and other services.

In 1993, following the Audit Commission report "Children First", which welcomed the guide's recommendations, the NHS Executive made child health a second-line priority for 1993-94. Furthermore, perinatal, infant and child mortality are, as the hon. Gentleman knows, falling significantly compared with figures for 20 years ago, for which we can all be grateful.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of what he views as Wakefield's difficult future funding situation. Regional health authorities, in making allocations to health districts for 1995-96, are following the policy that no district such as Wakefield—which, as the hon. Gentleman said, is over target in terms of the allocation formula—will lose resources in real terms.

It is for regional health authorities to make allocations to district health authorities and to decide which formula to use in setting targets. The resources that Wakefield health authority will receive next year will be greater than was predicted earlier by the authority. Although the revised weighted capitation formula will have a bearing

on future years, it will not affect Wakefield's level for growth in 1995-96. To put this in absolute numbers, I understand from the regional health authority that Wakefield health authority will receive total funding of £134 million next year, which amounts to an extra £6.2 million, including £900,000 of growth money.

This does not commit anyone to specific funding for future years, but it does show that real growth in health resources continues; so some of the hon. Gentleman's dire predictions, made here and elsewhere, about reductions in allocations to Wakefield are clearly exaggerated.

Mr. Hinchliffe: They are not my predictions; they are those of the director of finance of the health authority. The figures were put to the December meeting of the health authority.

Mr. Sackville: To suggest that, because Wakefield is a certain percentage above target, there will be a cut next year, or in any succeeding year, is wrong. That is unlikely. There will probably continue to be real growth in health resources in years to come, so there will continue to be more resources, in real terms, for Wakefield.

I understand that James Wilkinson spent almost all the first year of his life in hospital, and Wakefield health authority, the local authority and the Pinderfields trust have worked together to ensure that he can now be supported at home. I believe that the hon. Gentleman became involved in acting on behalf of the family to clarify the position of the various statutory authorities while the Wilkinsons' house was adapted and James's health care needs were assessed. I am aware of how diligently the hon. Gentleman has worked, and continues to work, to represent the needs of the family.

As the hon. Member for Wakefield said, James is now supported at home by qualified nursing staff, who, in conjunction with his parents, provide a 24-hour care package. Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson currently cover two shifts at a weekend and two evenings each week. The full cost of the care package exceeds £100,000. I am aware that the health authority has maintained contact with North Staffordshire hospital, which provides specialist paediatric services to children with this condition. The view of Professor Southall, the acknowledged expert on Ondine's syndrome, is that 24-hour qualified paediatric nursing is not necessarily required. It is also very important that the family circumstances be normalised as soon as possible.

I understand that James already attends a nursery for three mornings a week, where he is accompanied by qualified staff, and that, as a result of a recent review of his care needs, it is expected that he will shortly attend Pinderfields hospital school for two full days a week. The school is specifically for children with complex health problems. While he is at the school, a bed will be dedicated for him on a ward in case he should require a nap. The nursing cover which is usually available at home will continue to be available in the school.

Wakefield health authority fully understands the nature of its on-going responsibility towards James, but his needs may, of course, change as he grows older. The authority has made it clear that there is no possibility of it withdrawing support for James. The extent of the support, however, will need to be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it is appropriate. As children grow older, they are more easily able to control their pattern of sleep and are less likely to need sleep during the day time. Thankfully, the level of care needed by such a child as James may alter in future years.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me—he has already praised Wakefield health authority—in welcoming the actions of the authority in providing resources so that James can be cared for properly at home. James is, and will remain, the responsibility of Wakefield health authority while he resides in the area. His case clearly involves considerable resources, but it is not unknown for such expensive cases to be borne by many health authorities. That is one of the reasons why we have sought to have health authorities that are financially strong. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have fewer and larger health authorities than we had some years ago, so that where there are such expensive cases they can be borne by individual authorities without an undue impact on other patients.

As I have said, there is no question of Wakefield health authority withdrawing its support of James. It is a matter not of resources but of the authority continuing to fund the appropriate level of care for James.

Clearly, it will be in everyone's interest for the health authority and all those concerned to continue to review James's case regularly. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and James's family that that is not because the authority lacks the commitment to pay for his continued care. It is essential that, as he gets older, the care that is provided is appropriate to his needs.

I share the hon. Gentleman's determination to ensure that high-quality treatment is available to those suffering from Ondine's syndrome, like James, for the benefit of patients and their families. I am sure that, in the case of James Wilkinson, Wakefield health authority, Pinderfields hospital trust and the local authority all share that commitment. Once again, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising such an important subject.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I have no personal doubt about Wakefield health authority's commitment to offering the care that James Wilkinson and his family need. I am concerned that it has told me that it faces immense difficulties. To its credit, it invited me to a meeting to discuss James's case during the early autumn of last year. It was made clear to me that the health authority feels that it is under immense budgetary pressures because of the demands of one patient for £102,000 of its fairly tight annual budget.

The Minister will know that there other cases nationwide that are causing similar concern. I learnt today of a Minister who has someone in his constituency with a problem similar to that of James Wilkinson, where there is a difficulty with the local health authority budget.

Away from James's case, I am saying as a point of principle that it should be recognised that there are health authorities, such as Wakefield, that are facing difficulties, and other constituents are not receiving treatment as a result of the huge resourcing demands of one particular case.

I ask the Minister whether the principle of earmarked funding—top-slicing funding within a budget—to protect the care package for someone like James can be considered by the Government. It is an issue of principle accepted, as the Minister will be aware, by his Department in ring fencing community care funding. It is no different, in my view, from recognising a specific area of need and

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

difficulty that may not be properly resourced without some protection. The hon. Gentleman has not really answered the central point in the debate—looking at the way in which the formula will operate in future to secure and protect funding in cases such as James Wilkinson's.

Mr. Sackville: I can say only that the future funding for James Wilkinson is protected by the fact that Wakefield must accept responsibility for providing an appropriate level of care. It now has a budget of £134 million. It is by no means unusual that health authorities should have individual cases that cost a great deal of money: it may be because of the level of nursing care, as in this case; it may be because of very expensive drugs or particular treatments, or because of long periods spent in intensive care, or whatever. We have attempted to find a structure with a smaller number of larger health authorities so that a health authority is able to absorb such costs. As I have also said, James's condition and needs may change, and that issue must be reviewed regularly. While he needs that level of care, he will receive it from Wakefield. The hon. Gentleman has my assurance on that.

Mr. Hinchliffe: After he has studied the comments in *Hansard* tomorrow, will the Minister give an assurance that he will personally discuss with Wakefield health authority its concerns in respect of the principles in James Wilkinson's case and the specific difficulties? It would be helpful if Wakefield said to the Minister directly what it has said to me. Clearly, his brief does not take into account Wakefield's very real concerns about its budget.

Mr. Sackville: Health authorities must provide a wide spectrum of care for many different patients, some of whom have special needs. They must make the commitment to care for all those patients. I will certainly consider what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 19 January 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 26 January.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Larne-Belfast Rail Route

1. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation has taken place between the chairman of Northern Ireland Railways and the Northern Ireland Office on the reduction of customer services along the Larne-Belfast rail route.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): None. This is an operational matter which properly falls within the remit of the Northern Ireland Railways management.

Mr. Beggs: Millions of pounds have been spent on the Belfast cross-city rail link, which has enhanced links between Larne and Belfast. Northern Ireland Railways has reduced services and abolished even request stops at Glynn and Magheramorne in my constituency. How does that contribute to the Minister's transport policy for Northern Ireland? How does Northern Ireland Railways expect to increase customer use by preventing access to the rail link? Will the Minister ask Northern Ireland Railways to review the decision?

Mr. Moss: I understand that market research undertaken by Northern Ireland Railways suggested that long-haul business could be generated by a reduction in running times through rationalisation of the intermediate stops. The hon. Gentleman referred to the cross-harbour rail link; he will be pleased to note that there has been a 10 per cent. increase in passenger journeys on the Belfast-Larne line since it was opened last November.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend accept that improvement in the economic geography of Northern Ireland, including development of its rail and other transport systems, will help to continue to reduce unemployment? Does my hon. Friend share my joy that the level of unemployment in Northern Ireland is now at its lowest for 13 years? Does he recall that the last time Northern Ireland's unemployment was at the same level as Great Britain's was in 1968, before the troubles started?

Mr. Moss: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. That is the best news that Northern Ireland has had for many years.

Ceasefire

2. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position on the ceasefire by paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Four and a half months have elapsed since the IRA's ceasefire and three since that of the Loyalists. Everyone welcomes that. We must now secure that violence in Northern Ireland is over for good, and that means that the so-called punishment beatings must stop too.

Mr. Winnick: I certainly agree with what the Secretary of State has just said. Does not the ending of a number of Army patrols in Northern Ireland demonstrate that, without terrorism, there would be no need for the Army to patrol in Northern Ireland at all?

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that it is important, both for the ceasefire and in the overall national interest, that the Government do not abandon the creation of meaningful cross-border bodies? Is he also aware that there is a grave suspicion that the Government will act as they did last night, and abandon what is essential for peace in Northern Ireland and for good relations with the Republic to buy the votes of the Unionist Members of Parliament, who will then support the Government—as they did last night—so that the Government can survive in difficult circumstances?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman spoilt a good opening with a cynical conclusion. Of course he is right to say that we all look forward to the day when there is no need for the Royal Ulster Constabulary to be helped by the Army: the RUC, the Army and the people of Northern Ireland all look forward to it. But no change will be made except on the professional advice of my security advisers. That has been the case hitherto, and it will continue to be the case.

In our quest for a shared understanding between the two Governments—which we nowadays describe as a joint framework document—we are trying to find a means by which proposals can be made that will help the political parties to sit round the table together.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Does the Secretary of State concur with the view expressed by the assistant chief constable that the IRA should be kept intact? Did he tell students recently that the Sinn Fein leader should be propped up?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The RUC has a great record, which is a source of pride to everyone in Northern Ireland and in the entire United Kingdom. I think it very desirable, for example, for the RUC to recognise the need to examine the transition to peacetime policing—if I may put it like that—and, similarly, for the police authority to consult, as it is now doing.

As for the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I note that there is now a ceasefire and that exploratory dialogue is taking place. That strikes me as a change for the better, and I do not wish to disturb the trend.

Mr. Trimble: Does the Secretary of State share our concern about the repeated threats from Sinn Fein/IRA to resume—most recently, earlier this week by Mitchell McLaughlin—and the rumours that the IRA is trying to

acquire additional weaponry, especially rocket launchers, and that the Derry brigade is re-equipping? Does he agree that it is now essential that those who said that this was going to be a permanent peace—I am thinking of the Dublin Government, the SDLP and especially the leader of the SDLP—should bring pressure to bear on Sinn Fein/IRA to prove that they are committed permanently to peace?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Any sign that a political party—Sinn Fein and the IRA in particular—is associated with a policy involving the use of violence for political purposes is extremely reprehensible, disgraceful and unwelcome. I do not comment on rumours, but I note that it is widely believed that the IRA continues in existence. Equally, I note that, with the disgraceful exception of the murder of Mr. Kerr in Newry, in November, there have been no deaths and no terrorist injuries since the end of August. That is something of which I am extremely glad, as is everyone in Northern Ireland. I want every possible influence to be brought to bear on all who have previously been associated with paramilitary organisations to persuade them to desist and to put violence wholly behind them for good.

Mr. Hume: Does the Secretary of State agree that we now have the best opportunity for lasting peace and stability that we have ever had? Will he confirm that, at the end of the day, the only way to achieve that lasting stability is by an agreement among our divided people which threatens no section of that people? Will he also confirm that private agreements or promises for the internal politics of this House would in that situation be utterly irresponsible? Can he assure the House that there are no such private agreements or private promises?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that there is now a good opportunity—probably the best, certainly for 25 years—to secure a lasting peace. That does not, of course, rest with the Government alone. We wish to do all that we can to help the peace become secure. That is something that has to be done by proper, not improper, means. Equally, consent is the basis for stability in future and there is no point in the Government taking a course that is not likely to be sustained by consent.

Mr. Hunter: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the purpose of the framework document, which he mentioned earlier, is to promote round-table talks, and not to deter them, that it will essentially be a consultation and discussion document, and that it will impose nothing, as the agreed way forward is by consent, not by coercion? Will he confirm that any agreement that may emerge from discussion on the joint document will be subject to a referendum of the people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I want this to be much more widely understood than it seems to be at the moment. Party leaders asked us—the two Governments— to set out proposals that would seem to be acceptable to them as offering the best prospect of getting wide acceptance across the whole community for a political accommodation which the parties have been seeking for several years. That is what we are trying to do. There is no question of trying to impose it. We shall offer it and if it is rejected, it is rejected; if it is accepted, it is accepted. We want to use it to help them get back around the table again. As the Prime Minister said, the outcome of the talks process, if it is resumed, will be put to the people in a referendum.

Ms Mowlam: Does the Secretary of State agree that directness and openness are crucial for all parties as the peace process unfolds? If so, will he give a straight answer to the part of the question from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) that he avoided and to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), which he described as "cynical"? When things were ruled in and out of the framework document last night to the benefit of some people in the negotiations and for the electoral expediency of the Government, was it or was it not a secret deal that will create problems in the peace process?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The peace process is something to which everybody in the House is committed. There is no framework document. We hope that there will be a framework document, but a lot of work needs to be done before there is. The basis for any future arrangements in Northern Ireland must be one of consent widely shared across the whole community. That is what informs the Government's approach to these matters and will continue to do so.

Planning Law

3. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to make changes in planning law in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: A proposed draft Planning (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order in Council is under preparation. If approved, the order would come into operation during 1996.

Mr. Ross: Is the Minister aware of the problems that have arisen in regard to the agricultural policy conditions which are attached to some planning permissions in rural areas? Would it not be wise to look carefully at some of the difficulties that have been created with a view to granting an amnesty? Will the Minister take the opportunity provided by the new order to tighten up the planning regulations to ensure that the underlying objectives of the present legislation are actually achieved in future?

Mr. Moss: I am aware of the problems outlined by the hon. Gentleman and of the need to take firm action to bring about a lasting solution. My Department is reviewing the agricultural occupancy condition and its enforcement, especially in the light of the recent planning appeals commission ruling. I refer here to the so-called Harvey case. I hope to publish something in the next few months.

Sir James Kilfedder: Is the Minister aware that there is a great deal of resentment throughout Northern Ireland about the way in which planning law is implemented when, for example, planning permission is given for a development against the wishes of the majority of people in that area? Therefore, can the people of Northern Ireland, and people elsewhere if need be, have a right of

appeal when planning permission is granted, just as someone who applies for planning permission and is refused it can appeal?

Mr. Moss: The people of Northern Ireland have a right to appeal under the current legislation. I am proposing, in addition to the proposed draft planning amendment order, four subordinate pieces of legislation during 1995. After producing the review of the planning system, which I hope to publish in the next few months, we shall put it out to consultation; the hon. Gentleman will be able to make submissions at that time.

Mr. William O'Brien: When considering the review of the planning system, will the Minister have regard to the fact that many groups in Northern Ireland, especially the district councils, are remote from the planning system? If the Government believe in taking planning nearer to the people, will the Minister ensure that district councils have more involvement in planning matters than they have at present?

Mr. Moss: I should have thought that the matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers would be part of the strand one talks that which will be taking place, and would be part of the agreement between all parties in Northern Ireland on the way forward for local government.

Peace Talks

4. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from Sinn Fein regarding progress in the peace talks.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: A range of issues has been raised in the course of exploratory dialogue between Sinn Fein and Government officials. Those exploratory talks continue.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his reply. Further to the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that now that Sinn Fein has admitted that it has influence on the IRA, it is incumbent on it to insist that the IRA makes a significant demonstration of its commitment to surrender weapons? Furthermore, it must end the punishment beatings.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with my hon. Friend. Any influence that can be brought to bear should be brought to bear to instil into everyone who may think to the contrary that there is no place for violence of any kind—including punishment beatings—in the democracy which is Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maginnis: Can the Secretary of State give me a single area in which the IRA-Sinn Fein delegation, led by Martin McGuinness, has made a single concession or adjustment since 31 August? Is there not a danger, if adjustment after adjustment is made by the Government in response to the ceasefire, that the IRA will feel justified in the violence that it has used and that law-abiding people will feel disheartened? Is it not time that the Government stopped, studied the situation and attempted to see whether the books could be balanced?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Sinn Fein has got nothing out of the Government and the Government have got nothing out of Sinn Fein. What each of us has got is dialogue with the other and that on the back of a ceasefire, which has lasted now for four and a half months. It should, of course, have come into force much sooner, but it is in force and we welcome it. That represents, I believe, an improvement on anything that we have known for 25 years and we must build on it.

Rev. William McCrea: Bearing in mind the continuing sadistic beatings of old and young people throughout the community, the daily threats and intimidation of our people, the continuing serving of exclusion orders on our young people by the IRA, the continuing robberies and racketeering, the stockpiling and moving of arms, the recruiting, the training and the active targeting by IRA terrorist groups which is going on, will the Secretary of State tell the House specifically when, during the present talks with Sinn Fein, the Sinn Fein delegation first, renounced violence and secondly, unreservedly condemned the murder of the innocent Mr. Kerr from Newry?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there are far too many signs of a continuance of the use of violence for political purposes, not simply on the Republican side of the paramilitary spectrum, but on the Loyalist side. From either side, it is totally repugnant. We know that on 31 August there was a declaration that what were called military operations had ceased. Everybody knows, and the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein know, that the Government require that there shall be confidence that the ceasefire is intended to be for good. That is why substantial progress must be made on the issue of the decommissioning of arms in this exploratory phase. As a matter of reality, we cannot move from that phase unless that happens.

Mr. Mallon: I have been involved in the peace process over the past 25 years in South Armagh, long before it came into vogue. Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a perception in the Nationalist community which is damaging to the peace process, and that is that somehow or another there is a pan-Unionist front at work in Westminster? Does he also accept that it is unedifying—indeed, bad for the political process—to have his Government's nose tweaked by the Unionists almost on a daily basis? Will he assure the House that the Government will not respond to those bullying tactics every week? In effect, he now has the opportunity, for the third time during this Question Time, to state categorically to the House that the Government will not sacrifice peace or progress to satisfy their own party political expediency in the House.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course peace will not be sacrificed by the Government. The Government have done more to achieve peace than any other Government of any colour in the past 25 years, so I think that that charge will be rejected. As for the nose being tweaked, I have rather a large nose and I am not conscious of it having been tweaked at all. What I am conscious of is that in the *Belfast Telegraph* about a fortnight ago, the whole of one page was taken up with assertions that the Government were being hammered or were under fire by Nationalists and that they were being grilled or otherwise

mistreated by Unionists. That seems to be about par for the course and I shall continue, for my part, to do what I believe to be right.

Mr. Couchman: My right hon. and learned Friend has stressed the need for the decommissioning of weapons. Has he had any significant contribution from Sinn Fein, the IRA or, indeed, from the other paramilitary organisations on the other side of the sectarian divide, about the circumstances in which they would give up their weapons? Furthermore, can he tell me what seizures of weapons and what arrests for possession of weapons have taken place since the ceasefire at the end of August?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I shall not go further than my hon. Friend the Minister for State has gone, at the end of each of the sessions of exploratory dialogue, in describing what has taken place. However, I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), who takes such a close and proper interest in these matters, that it is necessary to inculcate confidence in the people of Northern Ireland—not just in the Government—that the intention on the part of the paramilitaries is to give up, for good, violence, the threat of violence and the justifying of violence. That is why substantial progress must be made, in this exploratory phase of the talks, in the issue of decommissioning arms and making them no longer available for use.

Mr. Alton: Will the Secretary of State accept that many hon. Members have had considerable confidence in him and in the Government because of the way in which they have conducted the negotiations so far, but to maintain that credibility it is vital that the Government are not seen to be aligned to any group? The Secretary of State's failure to respond to questions that have been put to him legitimately this afternoon, and his failure to say that the Government are not involved in a specific agreement with one party in this House, will be read as a confirmation that they are.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments. For my part, I shall continue, as I have done for the past two and a half years, to do all that I can to help all the political parties in Northern Ireland to reach an accommodation, because that is the only way in which stability can be achieved. As the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) has said, that can be achieved only by consent. I have to have regard to what is likely, and what is not likely, to achieve consent when I look at the whole spectrum of the options available to the Government.

Welfare of Equines

5. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to ensure the welfare of equines; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): The Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 makes it an offence to cause, procure or permit any unnecessary suffering to any animal, including equines. Veterinary inspectors from the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland enforce this legislation and, where serious breaches are found, prosecution action is taken.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend assure me that no horses or other equines will be allowed to be exported from Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland for slaughter for food or for onward export in defiance of minimum values? Will he also accept my invitation to join the pledge given to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), the former Minister for Food, that he, like me, will never knowingly eat a horse?

Mr. Ancram: I can certainly confirm that I would not knowingly eat a horse although I am sometimes accused of eating like one. In Northern Ireland, the horse is a much-respected creature both as a means of healthy recreational activity and sometimes as a vehicle for speculative, if often unsuccessful, financial investment. It is certainly not regarded as a culinary delicacy. Horses which are exported through the Republic of Ireland come under welfare controls which effectively prevent their export for slaughter.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Given the greatly increased population of the equine species in Northern Ireland, will the Minister consider giving some financial assistance to the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in its efforts to protect those animals from human cruelty?

Mr. Ancram: I shall certainly pass the hon. Gentleman's remark on to my noble Friend who has responsibility in that sector. However, there have been no prosecutions in Northern Ireland in relation to horses over the past three years. I understand that that is largely because people in Northern Ireland have an immense respect and affection for their horses.

Electricity Interconnector

6. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the Director General of Electricity Supply to publish his report on the proposed interconnector with Scotland.

Mr. Ancram: I am informed by the Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland that he expects to publish his report by the middle of February of this year.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Minister. Does he accept that the interconnector would result in a 15-year monopoly with electricity prices going up and job losses in Northern Ireland? As we now know that the Ove Arup report to the European Commission said that that was not the most economic solution, if the director general comes to the same conclusion, will not the Secretary of State be obliged to reconsider that misconceived project?

Mr. Ancram: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the planned interconnector project is being promoted jointly by Northern Ireland Electricity and Scottish Power, which are two private companies and which must make their own judgment. Two planning inquiries are taking place at the moment, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman knows enough to realise that, as

Ministers will eventually have to take a view of the results of those planning inquiries, it would not be right for me to pre-empt the outcome of those inquiries at this stage.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does not my hon. Friend find it astonishing to hear a Scot not wanting to sell something that is produced in Scotland? Is not that another example of not caring about jobs in Scotland?

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend makes his point very well, but he will understand if I am not drawn into making a statement about the project in advance of the outcome of the inquiries.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Since the decision in favour of the Moyle interconnector between Northern Ireland and Scotland was made—the decision was certainly welcomed by most people in Northern Ireland—it has been announced that operation of the other interconnector between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is to be restored. That is the north-south co-operation which Ulster Unionists welcome. Will the Minister therefore tell the House whether the restoration of that north-south interconnector enhances or reduces the need for the Moyle interconnector to Scotland?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his question. I understand that the two interconnectors will serve different purposes, because, in effect, the interconnector between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is for mutual support during temporary shortfalls rather than to meet future electricity requirements. The interconnector between Scotland and Northern Ireland is meant to meet the latter.

Market Testing

7. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the effect of compulsory competitive tendering and market testing on the delivery of health and social services and job creation in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: Following a market test, contracts are monitored to ensure that they provide the specified service at the agreed cost. I understand that, overall, those contracts have maintained or improved services and have shown significant savings. Market testing is about the best way of providing services; it is not about job creation.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the Minister for his reply, which is totally at variance with the experience of the people of Northern Ireland. Subsequent to competitive tendering, the quality of services has been reduced, jobs have been lost and conditions in respect of future employment and tenure of office have deteriorated. Does not that show a fault in the Minister's research? I also draw the Minister's attention to the current attempt by the Down and Lisburn unit of management to extend compulsory competitive tendering well beyond the Department's remit to include matters such as security, porterage, telecommunications, ground maintenance, meals on wheels and so on, without consulting the Department. The board refuses to meet employees' union representatives. Will the Minister intervene immediately to remedy that impossible situation?

Mr. Moss: Market testing in the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland, in all material respects, is the same as in Great Britain. There are only minor procedural differences between the detailed implementation of the policy of market testing in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain. The real impact of market testing has been on costs. Until March 1994, for example, more than £60 million of support services have been market tested, with identified savings of more than £11 million per annum. That money has been retained and deployed by the HPSS for the benefit of patients.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Is it, therefore, Government policy to squeeze the wages of lowly paid workers and to reward chief executives and managers for so doing? Does not that policy militate against the hands-on care of people in the community as well as of those in hospital and add to demand on the social security budget?

Mr. Moss: It may have been true to say that market testing was piloted in certain ancillary services, but, since publication of the White Paper, "Competing for Quality", in November 1991, market testing has been expanded into all HPSS support services. In overall terms, it is true that efficiencies have been achieved and the number of directly-employed staff has been reduced. It should be made clear that not all categories of staff have been reduced. For example, in the period September 1990 to September 1993, medical staffing levels increased by 6 per cent.

Mr. Spellar: In view of the Minister's health brief he will be aware of clubs' concern at the delay in the publication of his consultative paper on licensing. When will he produce that paper, and will he ensure full consultation with all those concerned, especially the clubs?

Mr. Moss: The related reviews of the liquor licensing laws and on registered clubs have now been completed. I have taken decisions on the changes that I propose to make and I intend to issue a statement next week on the main changes to be contained in proposals for draft Orders in Council. Those will be published for consultation in due course.

Framework Document

8. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of discussions with the Irish Government on a framework document.

Mr. Ancram: We continue to make useful progress; there are still important questions to be resolved. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State hopes to meet the Tanaiste shortly to discuss the framework document. We hope that a shared understanding of potential areas of agreement with the parties may be reached reasonably soon.

Mr. Barnes: The framework document is of key importance to future peace and progress throughout the island of Ireland. It is therefore to be hoped that elements of co-operation in the development of jobs and travel, for example, will be extended. For instance in Ireland, but not in Northern Ireland, there is free travel for pensioners. However, might it not be pushing things too far to say that

what should be developed in the framework document at this stage is a call for joint executive boards, which would present all the problems concerning sovereignty?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question, but, as he would expect, I shall not become involved at this time in detailed discussion of the framework document. It is worth remembering that the purpose of that document is to form a basis for a shared understanding between the two Governments, in order to bring the parties back round a table to negotiate a political settlement. It would therefore be unwise, to say the least, for anything to be in the framework document which would prevent the parties from coming to the table. We certainly bear that consideration closely in mind in our negotiations with the Irish Government.

Mr. Wilshire: Can my hon. Friend assure the House that the framework document will contain no reference whatever to all-Ireland bodies that might have Executive powers over Northern Ireland?

Mr. Ancram: It has been made clear all along that relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will form part of the three-stranded process of discussion, and that those relationships will be institutionalised. The Secretary of State has already made it clear that there will be cross-border bodies with some Executive powers, but that the centrally important factors will be the extent, nature, source and accountability of such powers. Clearly, hon. Members will wish to study those when the document is eventually published.

Dr. Hendron: Will the Secretary of State guarantee that, irrespective of the contents of the framework document, and, indeed, of that of the other document that the Government are preparing, nothing will be imposed on the nationalist or the unionist people of Northern Ireland, and that agreement and consent will be the order of the day?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The key to the whole process is agreement and acceptability. That is why we made it clear that the framework document will be not a blueprint to be imposed but a shared understanding between the two Governments, which we hope will form the basis for taking negotiations forward. After those negotiations, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, must come agreement with the political parties. And the Prime Minister has made it clear that even after that, before any outcome can be implemented, there will be a referendum for the people of Northern Ireland. So the whole process must ultimately depend on agreement and acceptability.

Ms Mowlam: Will the Minister try answering the question that the Secretary of State failed six times to answer this afternoon? If he does not feel up to that, perhaps he can reassure the House that items in the framework document will not, in the weeks ahead, be negotiated into or out of it according to the Government's electoral expediency.

Mr. Ancram: I am surprised at the hon. Lady's cynicism. I thought that she was going to bring a fresh attitude to her party's policy on Northern Ireland. I am disappointed that she takes this line.

The hon. Lady must consider what the purpose of the framework document is. It is not a blueprint; it is not a settled policy as between two Governments which will then be imposed. It is the basis for further discussion and negotiation. What is in it and what is not in it will be as much a part of those conversations and negotiations as it is a matter for the two Governments at this time.

Homelessness

9. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he is taking to tackle homelessness.

Mr. Moss: The Housing Executive, having statutory responsibility for dealing with homelessness, arranges temporary and permanent accommodation throughout Northern Ireland. Its housing selection scheme gives top priority particularly to families accepted as homeless. The executive and other local bodies also provide extensive advice to those who are homeless, or who are threatened with homelessness.

Mr. Clapham: I am rather disappointed by the Minister's reply. He will be aware that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive completed only 810 units last year. He will also know that on 31 March 1994 there were 10,579 people listed as priority cases on the housing list. Shelter has estimated that there is a need to complete 2,000 housing units a year if we are to get to grips with the problem of homelessness in Northern Ireland. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with Shelter? If not, can he tell us why?

Mr. Moss: I certainly do not agree with Shelter. The executive is building fewer new homes because demand for houses has fallen. Over the past 13 years the urgent waiting list has fallen from nearly 19,000 applicants to 11,100, and executive dwellings are readily available in many parts of the Province.

In 1994-95, the executive hopes to complete 830 new homes and to re-let 10,000 existing properties.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: All right hon. and hon. Members are most anxious that all homeless people should be properly housed; but what progress has been made in overcoming the problem of benefit fraud in connection with giro drops, for which Housing Executive dwellings are being used as cover? If those houses were brought back into the general Housing Executive scheme of things, greater numbers of houses would be available for homeless people. Will the proposed reduction in Housing Executive staff have no effect on detecting giro drops?

Mr. Moss: The Housing Executive will have total resources of about £541 million for 1995-96. I am confident that that will be sufficient to enable the executive to continue to deal effectively with homelessness and to improve housing conditions.

I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman about fraud. It is covered by the review that I am undertaking in my Department with the DSS, to ensure that we clamp down on this unacceptable activity.

Local Enterprise Development Unit

10. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has had from the Local Enterprise Development Unit about the issue of non-assisted local firms competing with assisted firms.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the Minister share our fears that the Government's agenda for the Northern Ireland economy has not fully recognised the need to consult widely with local business leaders and community and voluntary groups in order more accurately to reflect the need to target available resources on area of special need?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is right about the need to consult widely on how to take advantage of the new peaceful situation in Northern Ireland and the beneficial effect that we hope that it will have on the economy of Northern Ireland. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister chaired an investment conference in Belfast before Christmas. There will be further consultation with representatives of the local councils in Northern Ireland shortly. We obviously wish to hear from others where best they think that any incoming funds can most effectively be applied. The Government have also made it clear that the targeting of social need in Northern Ireland will remain a main priority of our policy.

Peace Process

11. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) earlier today.

Mr. Soley: I congratulate the Secretary of State on the steps that he has taken so far in normalising the position in Northern Ireland. May I urge him to go a step further and end the use of the Emergency Provisions Act, which sits so uncomfortably in a parliamentary democracy? Will he consider making a statement soon that if the peace process continues all such emergency legislation will be ended?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said at the outset of his question. No one wants to see emergency powers available on the statute book in the United Kingdom save when they are necessary. Unfortunately, it is not the advice reaching me that the risk which it is the duty of the security forces to guard against has diminished to so great an extent that we are now able to do without the emergency provisions legislation. I do not think that the country and I certainly do not think that Northern Ireland would feel that that was a risk that we were justified in taking at this stage. I look forward to the day when it will be possible to meet the hon. Gentleman's wishes.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. French:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. French: Is my right hon. Friend aware of evidence of another type of sleaze in public life, namely, local councils making substantial grants to quasi-charitable organisations which then use some of the money received to produce party-political propaganda in support of those who have made the grants? Does he have measures to stop councils misusing public funds in that way when at the same time they complain of shortage of funds for other purposes?

The Prime Minister: We all want to see a very high standard of propriety in councils and assemblies at all levels. I read with some interest the views of an ex-Labour councillor set out clearly this morning. He referred to

"a mean-minded cocktail of political correctness, bureaucracy, intervention and abuse of public money."

The council in question was Islington.

Mr. Blair: Now that the Conservative Euro-rebels have published a public manifesto with a settled position on Europe which would effectively mean Britain's withdrawal from Europe, can the Prime Minister tell us whether there is any honest basis on which they can now return to the Tory Whip? If so, what is it?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman seeks to gloss over the fact that many views similar to those expressed by my hon. Friends are held by a large number of his hon. Friends, not least just below the Gangway and not least a little behind him. There are many and varied views on European policy in all political parties and right across the country. I believe that the policy that I have sketched out will carry with it the support of the overwhelming majority of the people in the country. In the next few months we will spell out not only what is not acceptable in the intergovernmental conference but what we wish to achieve in the IGC in 1996. I believe that the position that we will take will command the overwhelming majority of people both in the House and beyond it.

Mr. Blair: Are we to take it from that, that the right hon. Gentleman will not even repudiate their views? After all, he is the person *[Interruption.]*—

Madam Speaker: Order. We have little enough time at Prime Minister's Question Time without everyone making a row.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. Gentleman should remember that he withdrew the Whip from the Conservative rebels. Is not his problem the fact that he has one side of the Conservative party that is hostile to Europe, with its friends in the Cabinet, and the other side, with its friends in the Cabinet, which is favourable to Europe, and he is in the middle, never making up his mind? Does he not realise that that schism in his ranks will continue until he

makes up his mind, and that the damage will continue, not merely to his Conservative party or the other Conservative party, but to Britain and its interests in Europe?

The Prime Minister: Would the right hon. Gentleman care to remind the House how many policies he has changed during the past 10 days? I do not know whether he claims to have changed them, or whether he just parked them in the usual spot and they magically disappeared. If the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about unity on Europe, I suggest that he tries to unify his colleagues below the Gangway and those behind him.

As a man who claims to be consistent, the right hon. Gentleman should explain to the House why, in his 1983 manifesto, he wanted us to withdraw from the European Community, and why he now wants to become a federalist, handing powers in one direction to the European Union and in another direction away from this House to regional assemblies that no one wants—yet another policy that he talks about, but does not understand and has not thought through. If he has made up his mind on anything, when will he tell anyone precisely what that mind is?

Q2. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shaw: Will my right hon. Friend consider his responsibilities to that vulnerable group in our society who consider that they should have share options when others should not, the right to send their children to grant-maintained schools when others should not, and the benefit of their business friends receiving large pay increases to pay for their leadership elections when others should not? Does he not think that it is a duty of this Government to expose such hypocrisy?

The Prime Minister: I am more tolerant than my hon. Friend and I would like to help them. I will suggest a slogan that absolutely and exactly fits their present position: "Do as I say, not as I do."

Mr. Beith: While the right hon. Gentleman has fresh in his mind the experience of being saved from defeat by the votes of the Ulster Unionists, will he reflect on the possibility that, before very long, he may need those same votes on some purely English matter? Does that mean that he has excluded from his consultations the possibility of setting up a Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved powers, which would create a North Belfast question equivalent to the so-called West Lothian question, or does he admit that those constitutional niceties are what he uses as a pretext to deny more control over their own affairs to the people of Scotland and Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: Sometimes I despair of the right hon. Gentleman. He clearly does not understand the difference between a tax-gathering Parliament in Edinburgh and the re-introduction of a non-tax-gathering local government assembly in Northern Ireland—no wonder his party has been in opposition for 75 years.

Mr. Sykes: Is the Prime Minister aware that another subversive group of Labour Members today called for a devolved assembly in Yorkshire? While we do not mind if Lancashire breaks away, may I assure my right hon. Friend that we in Yorkshire are proud of the United Kingdom and all we want is our ridings back?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of that new ramification in Opposition policy this morning, but my hon. Friend should not despair because they will have changed it by tomorrow.

Q3. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Spellar: The Prime Minister has just said, "Do not do as I do; do as I say". Does he recall that on Tuesday, he said, "We know who pays the Labour party"? He is right, because the figures are published. Will he now give a straight answer on whether he will publish the figures for donations to the Tory party, particularly foreign donations—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: On the day that foreign or any donors have 70 per cent. of the votes that determine our policy, the answer would be yes. But our policy is determined by our party, not in devil's pacts with trade union leaders to get the leader of the Labour party out of a difficult position on clause IV or any other subject.

Mrs. Lait: Should the reckless proposals by several of the Opposition parties to set up a Scottish Parliament ever be carried out, does my right hon. Friend agree that the number of hon. Members from Scotland should be reviewed down from the current 72 to 45, as set out in the 1707 treaty of Union? Would he care to nominate those hon. Members whose constituencies should disappear?

The Prime Minister: It is very tempting but perhaps not a matter for me. My hon. Friend, however, has powerful support for what she says.

"After devolution, the position of Scottish hon. Members would be untenable."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1977; Vol. 939, c. 157.]

"it would be wrong for those from Scotland to seek to interfere in English domestic affairs after that watershed has been reached."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1977; Vol. 195, c. 457.]

Before the hon. Gentleman at the back of Chamber shouts, may I tell the House that the words that I have just used are a quote from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. We could all hear what is being asked if hon. Members were a little less noisy. Question 4 has been called. The Prime Minister.

Q4. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: Given the concern about negative equity and repossessions, has the Prime Minister noticed that the average cost of repaying a mortgage is to rise by £3.50 a week; residential rents are rising at twice the rate of inflation; and his Government have cut the housing

associations' development programme by 45 per cent.? How does paying more for housing and getting less fit in with his new vision?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman, who has a great knowledge of housing, should cast his mind back a little further. He will have noticed that the average cost of a mortgage over the past couple of years or so has fallen by £140 a month as a result of changes in interest rates brought about by the Government's policies. He should also know that half a million extra people became home owners for the first time in the past year. I am afraid that he is behind on his facts and wrong.

Mr. Butterfill: Which particular clause of the treaty of Rome gives members of the European Parliament jurisdiction over British industrial policy, particularly nationalisation? Is it clause 4, or am I confusing it with some other document?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt about the advantage of British control over British industrial policy, as we can see by the growth of exports, which grow month after month, and the fact that we now have the most broadly based, secure pattern for growth with modest inflation that we have seen in this country for very many years. That is evident in the growth figures; evident in the drop in unemployment and it is evident from the fact that that has been happening not for the occasional month but month, after month after month, after month and people cannot deny that.

Mr. Prescott: What about Maples?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, fresh from his recent searches, should search again the unemployment statistics to see how they come together and then apologise to those civil servants whom he accused of fiddling them some months ago.

Q5. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clarke: Is the Prime Minister aware that the proposed Assembly for Northern Ireland is accepted by the whole of the House? Once that Assembly is formed, will the people who represent Northern Ireland constituencies be allowed to vote on every issue before the House?

The Prime Minister: No one is devolving to the Northern Ireland Assembly tax—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question"] I am explaining to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) why his question is based on a mistaken belief. No one is devolving to the Northern Ireland Assembly tax-gathering powers or exclusive control over education or health. The Opposition are trying to hide the fact that their policies would inexorably lead to the break up of the United Kingdom whereas our policies are determined to maintain the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hendry: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, yesterday, the former leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) voted against the Government on the fisheries motion? Can my right hon. Friend enlighten the House on the rules of corporate responsibility as they affect European Commissioners? Is it in order for the right hon. Member for Islwyn to undermine his fellow Commissioners?

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) is a Member of this House and the way he votes has nothing to do with ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Hendry *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman can put another question, which I will accept, but ministerial responsibility must enter into it.

Mr. Hendry: Will my right hon. Friend advise the House on the role of corporate responsibility among European Commissioners to see whether it is in order for them to vote not only to undermine their colleagues but their wives as well?

The Prime Minister *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I had to give Prime Minister's questions an extra minute because the Prime Minister did not start until 3.16 pm, but it was hardly worth my while. Time is up.

Business of the House

3.32 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 23 JANUARY—Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill (First Day).

TUESDAY 24 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Disability Discrimination Bill.

Motion relating to the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy) Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 25 JANUARY—Continuation of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill (Second Day).

THURSDAY 26 JANUARY—Opposition Day (2nd allotted day) (1st part). Until 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on mortgage interest relief for persons on income support on an Opposition motion.

Followed by a debate on the future of rural England on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 27 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

I am not yet in a position to give as full an indication of the following week's business as I would wish, but I hope that it will help the House to know that the consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill on the Floor of the House will be brought to a conclusion on Monday 30 January. I expect to provide Opposition time later in the week and there will be a debate on science in the second half of Thursday 2 February on a motion for the Adjournment.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet on Wednesday 25 January to consider European Community Document No. 11141/94 relating to reform of the sugar regime.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for the information that he has given and for the partial information that he gave for the following week, and confirm to him that it would always be helpful to the House to have information about the following week's business, even provisionally.

In view of the shortcomings of the Child Support Agency, which were identified today by the Parliamentary Ombudsman as mistaken identity, failure to answer correspondence, inadequate procedure, incorrect advice and delays, in a report which has prompted an apology from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), when can we expect such an apology to be made in the House and when can we expect Ministers to announce a complete overhaul of the Child Support Agency, as Labour has long demanded?

On another matter, in view of the press conference this morning which has formalised the split between independent Conservatives and the Government, in which the group of independents issued its own set of priorities—indeed, its own manifesto—and set out its own agenda, and in view of the inadequate answer that the Prime Minister gave in response to the question about political funding asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), will the Leader of the House find time in the near future for a debate on the need to define and register political parties?

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, as I am sure the hon. Lady would expect, I neither accept the suggestion that my right hon. Friend's reply was inadequate nor do I intend to seek to add to it.

On the Child Support Agency, I thought that the hon. Lady's remarks were marginally ungenerous, as the Government have already made it clear that they accept the findings of the ombudsman's report. Indeed, she might have referred to the fact that the ombudsman comments favourably on the significant improvements that have already been introduced by the chief executive which, he recognises, should bring general benefits. As for a statement of further Government policy on that subject, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security expects to announce the Government's response to the Social Security Select Committee shortly, and I am sure that that will help the hon. Lady.

I noted, and was again grateful for, the hon. Lady's remarks about my remarks on business. I shall, of course, continue my efforts to give as much information as possible about the second week's business. I am sorry that I have not been able to do as much as I would have liked this week, as a result of a number of uncertainties, but I shall continue to strive.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate about charities abusing their special privileges, in view of the decision by the Charities Commission to investigate the political difficulties of the Institute for Public Policy Research?

Mr. Newton: I will certainly consider my hon. Friend's point, but I think that I would want to study with great care what the Charities Commission has said.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Returning to the important issue of the future amendment or otherwise of the Child Support Agency, is the Leader of the House aware that there has been press speculation that the Government have now already decided that there shall be primary legislation to try to amend the existing legislation? Can the Leader of the House confirm, not only that we shall have a statement about that next week, but that we shall have a time at which we can fundamentally recast the existing primary legislation?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has much experience, and I do not suppose that hope has triumphed over it to the point of expecting me to comment on press speculation, but I have already said that my right hon. Friend expects to respond to the Select Committee shortly, and I am sure that that will resolve some of the uncertainties in the hon. Gentleman's mind.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent early debate on education in the county of Kent, given that, at the moment, we enjoy a range and variety of secondary schools second to none in the country and that, under the proposals of the Labour party, every school that we have that is different will be

converted to the comprehensive system, against the wishes of the people whom Conservative Members represent?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps my hon. Friend should seek out some prominent Member of the Labour party to send his offspring to a school in Kent. There appear to be plenty looking around to do so.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On the Child Support Agency, does the Leader of the House accept that a statement on the Social Security Select Committee report is simply not good enough? That law is ruining families. People are killing themselves because of it. It is wrecking family life and it is not good enough simply to come to the House with that narrow remit. A woman in my constituency who has cared for her child for eight years by herself has now, because of the agency's failings, lost custody of that child. It is causing heartbreak the length and breadth of the country. We demand a debate immediately on that awful law.

Mr. Newton: It is not all that long since the House had a debate on the subject in which, understandably, a number of strong views were expressed. I have made it clear that, as would be expected, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will respond to the Select Committee's report. That does not necessarily mean that his comments will be confined to points raised by the Select Committee.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the openness of information seekers? I was approached today, perhaps mistakenly, by the researchers of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who were desperately looking to find the dirt on directors. Perhaps they wanted the information prior to a statement to be made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East next Tuesday.

Mr. Newton: I will certainly consider what my hon. Friend has said. I do not think that he asked me for a debate next week, but if he did I shall have to consider it when I see what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has to say.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): May we have a statement from the Department of Trade and Industry next week; given the news today that Lady Archer is to resign from the board of Anglia Television, following the £80,000 profit that Lord Archer made on share dealings when Anglia Television was sold last year? The DTI and the President of the Board of Trade found no grounds for an investigation following those events, yet Lady Archer is now to resign. May we now have a statement from the DTI in the light of the new information?

Mr. Newton: To my regret the hon. Lady has simply, once again, as some of her colleagues have done, used the Floor of the House to engage in mud-slinging that she would not care to do outside. I do not intend to join her in that.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on the Government's roads policy? While many aspects of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said before Christmas about the rebalancing of the programme are welcome, there is considerable concern in my constituency that it may threaten the construction of the Wyre Piddle bypass? Such a debate would give an opportunity to put my constituents' minds at rest on the subject.

Mr. Newton: You, Madam Speaker, may share my view that the subject that my hon. Friend has understandably raised on behalf of his constituents might bid for a place among what look like being popular debates on Wednesday mornings. If I may say so without infringing on your privilege, Madam Speaker, I hope that you will bear my hon. Friend in mind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House ensure that there is a statement next week about the plight of the fire services throughout Britain and the massive cuts taking place in all authorities due to the fact that, last year, a £43 million cut instituted by the Government was followed in this financial year by another £47 million cut for the sectors controlled by county councils? As a result, fire protection throughout Britain will be much reduced, stations will be closed and men thrown on the scrapheap. Is it not time for the Government to guarantee that that shortfall of money will be given to the local authorities so that those events do not occur in 1995?

Mr. Newton: It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman that I do not accept his description of what is occurring. The Government are concerned to ensure proper funding for proper services throughout the country. I expect the hon. Gentleman to have some opportunity to refer to such matters in the next few weeks.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend find time, if not next week, in one of the gaps in the business programme the week after next, for the long-overdue debate on civil air transport so that we can discuss the importance of early privatisation of the national air traffic control services and the likely impact on the industry, both of the transport value added tax measure passed last week and the passenger departure tax?

Mr. Newton: I will of course bear my hon. Friend's request in mind, but clearly I can give no commitment.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask a question of which I gave notice to the private secretary of the Secretary of State for Scotland and his office? It concerns the parlous state of the Forth rail bridge. The Secretary of State for the Environment said yesterday that he would personally inspect that marvellous structure, and we genuinely welcome that, but may we have a statement about the Government's responsibilities in the matter? It is serious, and it is urgent.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who, with his usual courtesy, told me of the matter that he wished to raise.

I understand that responsibility for the Forth rail bridge rests with Railtrack, but, as a result of representations made by the hon. Gentleman to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland—who is Minister with responsibility for education and housing at the Scottish Office—inquiries are being made

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of Railtrack by the Scottish Office about the maintenance of the bridge. I am sure that my hon. Friends will be in touch with the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will the Lord President find time in a busy parliamentary schedule to return to the agenda a subject that seems to have dropped off the edge—cross-rail? Following the magnificent work put in by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), and the great disappointment felt by both his constituents and mine after the measure fell through, it is very important that it is not allowed to be forgotten and continues to be debated in this place.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that we have recently debated, and will debate again in due course, another large project often linked with cross-rail—the channel tunnel rail link. I cannot promise an early debate on cross-rail, but I will certainly bring my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): The Leader of the House will know of the recent report from the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, which concluded that building new roads generates extra traffic. He will also know that the Secretary of State for the Environment has drawn attention to the worrying levels of pollution in the atmosphere which are caused by traffic, and the resulting damage to our health. May we expect an early statement on that contradiction between the Government's transport policies and what was said by the Secretary of State for the Environment, so that we can clarify the position and make some progress?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that there is any contradiction between Government policies in those two areas. As in a range of areas of public policy under any Government, objectives—all desirable in themselves—need to be balanced against each other. I am, however, grateful to the hon. Gentleman for welcoming, as I take it—and as I certainly do—the proposals for improving air quality announced recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on parking in central London, and particularly on the enthusiastic removal of cars from legal parking in the City of Westminster?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure precisely what my hon. Friend has in mind. Such a debate, however, would doubtless be replied to by the deputy Leader of the Opposition and we would all enjoy that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): May we have another debate on fish next week, and in particular on the 1,000 tonnes of fish that the Government are now reported to have promised Northern Ireland Members to shore up their sell-out to Spanish fishing interests? Is it a new 1,000 tonnes of fish, in which case I want to know who has lost 1,000 tonnes so that Northern Ireland can gain it, or is it not—in which case, why are the Government conning Northern Ireland Members to shore up a discredited fishing policy?

Mr. Newton: I have two points to make. First, "sell-out" is a ludicrous description of the very successful negotiation conducted by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, as I thought last night's debate made clear. Secondly, that was an extensive debate in which the hon. Gentleman had plenty of time to make his points, and I do not propose to continue it this afternoon.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Given the huge public concern that has been expressed in the town of Brightlingsea in my constituency about the export of live animals, may we have an early debate on the subject? In particular, may we find out why Ministers cannot act under article 36 of the treaty of European Union because a subsequent directive has not been properly completed with the regulations below it?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend may have an opportunity to raise that point with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is due to answer questions next Thursday. Meanwhile, I simply point out that my hon. Friend knows full well that the Government are doing everything that they can to bring the standard of animal welfare in Europe to the level that we expect in this country.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On the Nolan debate, has the Leader of the House ever been lobbied himself by a commercial organisation at an unofficial or informal engagement since he has been in the Government—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is hardly a business question.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Nolan debate, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am not concerned about the Nolan debate. I am concerned about next week's business and questions to the Leader of the House, which should be in order. They should have nothing to do with the Leader of the House personally or who he has met at any time.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. If the hon. Gentleman can put his question in order I shall listen to it, but I cannot allow a question that is wholly out of order.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am sure you knew, Madam Speaker, that I wanted to get that point on the record. May we have a statement on the matter next week?

Mr. Newton: I am not entirely clear about the purpose or, indeed, the meaning of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I certainly do not expect to be able to provide time for such a statement next week. However, I have noticed that the hon. Gentleman is asking a great many questions on the subject.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): May I ask the Leader of the House to find time for a debate next week on the future of Europe to give us the opportunity to contrast the very welcome proposals made by the Prime

Minister for the intergovernmental conference in 1996, which include the notion that there should be no constitutional change, no single currency and significant deregulation in Europe, with the febrile, feeble and supine attitude that the Labour party adopts to the European Community, which would not only mean our ceding more national sovereignty but would lead to increased costs and the loss of thousands of jobs?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend outlines very effectively the contrast between the position of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and that of the Labour party. That notwithstanding, I do not think that I can find time for such a debate next week.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): The Leader of the House will be aware that the Prime Minister informed the House on Tuesday that the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill included measures to combat discrimination in the spheres of education and transport. He will also be aware that clause 12 specifically excludes education and transport. Will he therefore provide time—if not this week, next week—for the Prime Minister to apologise to the House for yet again misleading it on his position on civil rights for disabled people?

Mr. Newton: I see no reason for my right hon. Friend to apologise, given the part that he has played in bringing the Government to the point where we have produced in the White Paper a substantial package of measures to combat discrimination against disabled people. That package includes proposals for dealing with, among other things, transport and education.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend find time at the earliest opportunity for a debate on British agriculture so that the House can express its full-hearted support for those who work in and for it and drown out the snipers who would do down that valuable aspect of our economy?

Mr. Newton: I cannot immediately undertake to provide time for a debate on British agriculture, but I certainly share my hon. Friend's views about the efforts of those who work in the industry and their contribution to the national economy.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Leader of the House will recall that during the debates on coal privatisation various hon. Members, including the President of the Board of Trade, made soothing remarks about ancillary property. Will he therefore arrange for a statement next week by the President of the Board of Trade on the fact that British Coal Property is proposing to sell in London in huge parcels medium-sized farms and allotments in my constituency and across the country, contrary to the interests of the little person?

Mr. Newton: I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's concern to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend will not have missed the fact that devolution has become a live issue. As the Opposition have now presented their proposals for devolution, does he think that he could make time available for a good day's debate on them? If so, will he bear it in mind that, in the spirit of generosity, we should allow a free vote so that all hon. Members can express their true opinions?

Mr. Newton: I indicated in my opening statement that I should look to provide Opposition time in the latter part of the week after next. In the circumstances, the Opposition may wish to use that time to clarify their position. Whether they feel able to do so will be an interesting test.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 413?

[*That this House is surprised and concerned at the failure of Bradford Community Health Trust to publish the report of the recent inquiry into the escape by Raymond Pemberton, a remand prisoner accused of serious and violent offences, from outside a secure unit at Lynfield Mount Hospital last June; notes the honourable Member for Bradford West was told by the honourable Member for Battersea in a letter, dated 8th August last year, and by the honourable Member for Bolton West in a letter, dated 3rd August last year, that the inquiry's report would be published; further notes Professor Michael Schofield, Chairman of the Trust, in a letter, dated 11th July last year, told the Chairwoman at a local school governing body, that the report would be published; wonders who or what persuaded the Trust Board on 19th December to publish next day only the inquiry's recommendations; and urges that the undertakings given by two Parliamentary Under Secretaries of State at the Department of Health and Professor Schofield be now honoured by the publication of the inquiry report without further delay.*]

Will he arrange for time to be given to the hon. Members for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) to explain why they gave me undertakings last August that the report into an escape from a secure unit in my constituency would be published? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is a serious matter when two Ministers who belong to an Administration who claim to believe in open government collude with an unelected quango, the community health trust in Bradford, to suppress the publication of a report into a matter of important public policy?

Mr. Newton: My understanding is that the trust decided that only the report's recommendations would be published to ensure clinical confidentiality—to which, I imagine, the hon. Gentleman attaches importance—and to encourage those interviewed to be open and frank. Whether he agrees with that decision or not, it does not have quite the flavour of what he described.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for an early debate on the legal consequences of the ruling this afternoon by the House of Lords to uphold the life sentence against Private Lee Clegg for shooting a joy rider in a car which had burst through his patrol's position in Ulster? During that debate, we should discuss the fact that the ruling included the point that the yellow card, on which all our soldiers in Northern Ireland depend for their legal advice, had, in the

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eyes of the British courts, not got "any legal force." Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that the House will discuss the matter?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will understand that, especially in a matter of this kind, I would not wish to make any comments on a judgment that I have had no opportunity to study.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Reverting to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), may I ask the Leader of the House to arrange for some Minister to make an urgent, clarifying statement, more especially since those affected are Britain's 6.5 million disabled people? Are education and the means for transport to be included in the Bill or not? In other words, was the Prime Minister right or wrong?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman will have every opportunity to make his points in the debate on the Second Reading of the Disability Discrimination Bill next Tuesday. I have made it clear that the Government's package as a whole, set out in the White Paper, includes proposals for transport and education. That is part of the Government's overall effort to improve things for disabled people.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on the disgraceful decision of Kraft Jacobs Suchard to close by 1996 the Lyons instant coffee factory in Greenford in my constituency, which it bought only a year ago, with the loss of 280 jobs? The House could then examine what looks disgracefully like asset stripping and the removal of jobs in a completely unreasonable and unfair way.

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to provide time for such a debate. Again, it is a point that my hon. Friend might consider for the various Adjournment debate opportunities that now exist. I am sure that his remarks will be noted by the company at which they are directed and by my right hon. Friends.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the Leader of the House invite the Secretary of State for the Environment to make a statement in the House about charges for water and sewerage, not just to deal with the unacceptable 70 per cent. rise since privatisation, but to respond to a document sent to him at the end of September by the Water Services Association and the Water Companies Association asking that the law be amended or deregulated to allow water companies, where appropriate, to use council tax as a means of charging for water and sewerage? That request has been backed by more than 210 hon. Members. On 20 December, the Secretary of State told me that he would make a statement soon. Will the Leader of the House ensure that it is made very soon?

Mr. Newton: I will bring that point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I support the call made earlier for a debate on fire brigades? During that debate, we could highlight the very high standards of professionalism which were shown last night in Maidstone by the Kent fire brigade in dealing with what was probably the largest fire in the county since the last war. We would be able to join our hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) and the other Kent Members in congratulating those fire-fighters on their professionalism. Is it not also worth pointing out that the only way in which a fire brigade could be underfunded would be if the county council concerned shortchanged it?

Mr. Newton: I join my hon. Friend in his plaudits of the actions and the work that he has described.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): May we have an early statement about safety inspectors on roll-on roll-off ferries? The Leader of the House will remember that the inspectors were due to be privatised. Now press reports say that they are not, but there are indications that once the controversy has died down, they will be privatised. The policy is rolling about. It needs to be cleared up.

Mr. Newton: The important point about any such policy is that it should be effective in ensuring safety to the maximum practicable extent. I have no doubt that, whatever the regime, that will be the intention and the purpose of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on how some local authorities are implementing care in the community, because I am genuinely concerned about the Liberal Democrats in Devon county council placing people in local authority homes at £400 per week, when those people could get better care in private sector homes at £200 a week? That is a dreadful waste of taxpayers' money and, of course, is in breach of Government regulations.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend expresses a concern felt in various parts of the country, including my area, which was the subject of an Adjournment debate a week or so ago touching on somewhat similar points. I shall certainly bring that concern to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motions 410, 411 and 412?

[*That this House notes with concern the announcement by Stock Exchange on Wednesday 18th January that it proposes no action with regard to the conduct of Swiss Bank Corporation and its innovative market making activities; notes the extensive trading in derivatives and contracts for differences over the last four years; and calls on the Government to exert sufficient control over the regulatory bodies in order to prevent the further exploitation of regulatory loopholes.*]

[*That this House is concerned about the relationship that the Keswick family and Trafalgar House has with the Conservative Party and the Government in connection with Trafalgar House's bid for Northern Electric; notes that the sister-in-law of the Chairman of Trafalgar House is an adviser to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; also notes that Trafalgar House has made substantial donations to the Conservative Party in recent years; and calls upon the Government and the Conservative Party to clarify its relationship with Trafalgar House and the Keswick family.*]

[*That this House regards with concern the conduct of Swiss Bank Corporation and its innovative market making activities; believes that electricity share hedging and*

complex share option contracts entered into by Trafalgar House and Swiss Bank Corporation, which allow Trafalgar House to profit from movements in the share prices of RECs, create a false market; and calls for an immediate inquiry into contracts for differences share dealings and the tightening of legal loopholes which are being exploited by privileged individuals with no benefit to the consumer.]

Will he arrange a debate or perhaps a statement next week on the Swiss Bank Corporation and Trafalgar House and its dealings and takeover bid for Northern Electricity? There seems to be something fishy going on there and it has a hell of a smell. We need it cleared up.

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the early-day motions to which the hon. Gentleman refers. As I understand it, there has been an indication of further consideration of what are very complex issues and I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to comment further at this time.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider his position and allow a debate on the party system, the conventions of the House and, indeed, collective responsibility? In doing so, will he allow us to debate the convention that a Minister who chooses to vote against his party should resign from his office, especially as it appears that in the Labour party, someone can fail to support his party on a whipped vote and yet remain a Whip himself?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) originally made the point, in connection with the debate on the Committee of Selection, that the sort of thing to which my hon. Friend refers could be done in the Labour party and that one would still be expected to vote. He went on to say that he did not think that it was fair that any such system should operate anywhere else except in the Labour party. I can see that he has noted my hon. Friend's remarks and is making various defensive noises, but I cannot quite hear what they are.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): May I have a positive response to the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)? When the Prime Minister answered me on Tuesday he said that education and transport were to be included in the Government's Bill on discrimination against disabled people. He said that in a packed House and it went out to the entire nation. It was therefore believed that the Government's Bill applied to education and transport, when in fact there is a mass of exemptions in terms of education so that no funding authority is allowed to be considered in the areas covered, and "transport" does not apply to transport vehicles. In those circumstances, a statement by the Prime Minister, with the attendant publicity, is required or the House and the nation will be misled. They will discover that education and transport are covered fully in my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which is to be discussed on 10 February.

Mr. Newton: I have made it clear twice that the Government's proposals in the White Paper include measures relating to transport and education. I do not think that I can add anything further to that.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): In view of the events in prisons over recent months, and the on-going concern and criticism by very senior prison governors, should not there be a full day's debate as soon as possible on the present system of running our prisons?

Mr. Newton: There have been two very full statements by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on related matters both before and after Christmas. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) will be aware that very significant inquiries are now in train as a result. The sensible time to consider the appropriateness of a debate would seem to be when we have the outcome of the reports that are currently being prepared.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to consider the shock announcement by Rolls-Royce today to close its aero-engine design facility in East Kilbride, which will throw 600 highly skilled design engineers and support staff on the dole? Were the Government consulted about the announcement at national or Scottish Office level? Will the Leader of the House provide time next week for a debate on the future of the aerospace industries in this country and, in particular, the damaging policies of the Government which have led to a major decline in a key sector of our manufacturing economy?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I cannot promise a debate. However, I understand that the background is that Rolls-Royce is very much committed to East Kilbride and 1,000 people will continue to be employed in aero-engine repair. Rolls-Royce will continue to employ 4,000 people at six sites in Scotland. I hope that the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) will be encouraged, both in relation to the company and the Government's policy, that the business has recently announced major long-term contracts with Cyprus Airways and China Eastern Airlines.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on what has become known as the Blaby question on our decrepit democracy, which was exemplified last year when two Bills affecting only Wales went through the House, in respect of which 32 of the 38 Welsh Members were agreed, but which were determined by the mass of Members of Parliament from England and Scotland who had no knowledge of, interest in or responsibility for the areas covered by those Bills? Does the Leader of the House agree that Welsh and Scottish Members would gladly take responsibility for specific affairs in their own areas and forgo decisions in other parts of the country? We could then have assemblies in this country like the assemblies in Spain, France, Germany, Canada and many other countries which have a modern, decentralised system that does not threaten the unity of any of those states.

Mr. Newton: It sounded to me, interestingly, as though one Opposition Member has at last come forward with his answer, reasonably clearly, to what used to be the West Lothian question and which must now be regarded as the Linlithgow question. In that respect, the hon. Gentleman has done infinitely better than any of his right hon. or hon.

[Mr. Newton]

Friends so far. I, for one, would be interested to hear him put that question to the Leader of the Opposition, as it should be directed to him.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on the decision by the Labour-controlled borough of Croydon to increase the density of housing in the southern part of the borough while the Labour-controlled London Boroughs Association has just published a document calling for the protection of the open spaces in London upon which Croydon council wants to build?

Mr. Newton: If I had to provide time for a debate every time there was evidence of inconsistency in the policies of various organs of the Labour party, I should do nothing else, but I am sure that my hon. Friend's points will be noted.

Madam Speaker's Statement

4.9 pm

Madam Speaker: On Monday, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised two points with me about written answers. He first asked that I should make it clear that a written answer should not be made available to the press before it has been given to the Member who asked the question. I can readily confirm that that should be the case.

The present practice, which is well established, is that written questions may not be answered before 3.30 pm on the day for which notice has been given. Soon after that time, copies of the answer are sent by the Department concerned to the *Official Report*, the Library, the Press Gallery and the Table Office, as well as, of course, to the Member who tabled the question. It may sometimes be the case that the Member concerned is not in the House and that, therefore, he may become aware of the answer from press inquiries made before he has seen the text, but, in general, the Department should continue to make every effort to ensure that the Member gets the text of the answer no later than the press.

The hon. Member also asked that a Member whose constituency is directly affected by an answer should be informed of the answer as the same time as the Member who has asked the question and the press. There are no hard and fast rules about that, but I hold the firm view that, when a constituency or constituencies are specifically and directly affected by an answer, Ministers should seek to ensure that copies of the answer are given to the Members concerned at the same time as they are given to the Member who has asked the question and to the press. I hope that all Ministers will make every effort to observe that common courtesy in future.

It would also be a useful courtesy if any Member tabling a question directly affecting another's constituency—something which should not be done lightly in any case—took care to inform that Member of the action that he or she has taken.

A further related point was raised with me on Tuesday by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), namely whether, when a Member raises an issue in the House that affects another Member's constituency, he should inform the other Member that he intends to raise it. There is, in fact, a slightly broader issue to consider, namely whether Members should give advance notification when they refer to other Members in the Chamber.

There is, as I stated on 23 November 1994, at c. 598, a clear convention based on courtesy that notice should be given where such reference is intended to be made. I expect Members to observe that convention during debates and at Question Time when their reference is premeditated. There will, however, be occasions, especially at Question Time, when such a reference arises spontaneously and on the spur of the moment. In those cases, advance notification is unlikely to be practical, but Members should always consider whether reference to a colleague without notice is fair.

The House will have noticed that I am frequently—too frequently—called upon to deal with complaints on matters of that kind. That would not be necessary if, as I remarked on Monday, Members, including Ministers and

their Departments, exercised a little more common sense and forethought. I look to all concerned to do just that in future.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for that ruling, which I am sure all colleagues will regard as supporting the rights of all Members in holding the Executive and civil servants to account. May I ask a supplementary question on a matter which is not covered by your ruling but which touches the same general issue? Perhaps you can deal with it now because it is on the same issue and it is a matter that you have dealt with before. It relates to ministerial announcements and it is topical today because there was an example only this morning. It seems right to raise it now rather than to let it go by.

This morning in an interview on BBC radio the Secretary of State for the Environment refused to answer questions about his air pollution initiatives because, he said, he had first to give information to Parliament. In the event, there has been no statement, no answer in Parliament, and no written answer. In fact there was a press conference and a statement was made by the Department. I have heard you say before, Madam Speaker, that matters for Parliament should come here first, so it would be helpful if you added to the package that you have announced today a confirmation that when Ministers make statements about impending legislation, as happened at the press conference, the announcement should be made either to this place or by way of an answer in this place, before the press and the rest of the world are told.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not quite correct. The Secretary of State acted properly, and revealed in a written answer yesterday that copies of the Government policy document on air quality would be placed in the Vote Office and the Library at 9 o'clock this morning. That has been done. However, it is for Ministers to decide whether to make an oral statement to the House and whether to give press conferences or interviews to the media. In this instance the Secretary of State properly informed the House of his plans before holding a press conference.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Further to that point, Madam Speaker. I acknowledge what you have said, in that technically the Secretary of State had ensured that the House was informed, but you will be aware that, as often happens, the written answer that the Minister gave yesterday was not published in *Hansard* today. Although the Secretary of State may have been technically correct, he was not acting in the spirit of informing Members of what was going to happen. There is a problem when answers cannot be published in *Hansard* the following day, because Members are not then aware that a statement has been made, so they do not expect the information.

Madam Speaker: I think that the Secretary of State certainly acted in that spirit, as the hon. Lady said—and the House is aware that a written answer cannot always be published on the day in question. This was one of those cases. But I believe that the Secretary of State acted properly in the matter.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask you, in your capacity as the person with overall responsibility for the running of the House, to investigate an extraordinary waste of taxpayers' money. As I expect you do not know, the sign on the door of the gents' toilet in the Members' Corridor was recently repainted. This morning a member of staff spent three hours removing the recently repainted sign only to put it back with letters ¼ in. smaller, for the sake of some aesthetic judgment made by somebody. That is an extraordinary waste of taxpayers' money; will you look into it, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes, of course.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that I have written to you about my view that the Prime Minister misled the House on Tuesday regarding the contents of the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill. I am grateful for the time that you will spend considering my letter. Can you yet say when you may be able to respond?

Madam Speaker: No; as a matter of fact I have not seen the letter, and I was not aware that the hon. Gentleman had written to me. Correspondence between me and individual Members should not be raised in points of order across the Floor of the House. When a Member writes to me I should be given the opportunity to read the letter and to respond, as I always do, as soon as possible.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Further to the points of order arising from your statement, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that it is part of the conventions and courtesies of the House that when shadow spokesmen visit the constituencies of Conservative Members of Parliament they notify the Member concerned of their visit?

Madam Speaker: Yes, indeed; I have made that very plain. The custom relates not only to shadow Ministers but to all Members of the House of whatever party—Back Benchers and Front Benchers, including Ministers. I made that clear earlier this week, and I am constantly doing so. As I said at the end of my statement, I hope that all concerned will apply a little more common sense and behave reasonably and courteously towards each other.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on what appears to be a change in your policy on parliamentary language. A word that, when it was used by Members, was described as unparliamentary by the previous Speaker, was used yesterday in the House and appeared in *Hansard*. I believe that you know what the word is; my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) used it to describe seagulls' droppings. Are more colourful parliamentary proceedings, with the use of that word in all its forms, now in order, or can it be used only as a noun and not as an adjective or an expletive?

Madam Speaker: As I have explained before, the English language has a very rich vocabulary. I would prefer some other word to be chosen. I am sure that most hon. Members can find other ways of explaining precisely what they mean. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) had used the word before I realised it, but he is such a courteous Member that I know it was not offensively intended.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, I raise

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

points of order in the House only rarely. I seek your guidance on an issue that concerns hon. Members on both sides of the House. I refer to the difficulty that hon. Members encounter when trying to find ways of replying to inaccurate statements.

This week my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was accused, as a former Government Minister, of voting to restart live animal exports, which had been stopped in 1973. I have consulted *Hansard*, and it appears that on 12 July 1973 the motion that stopped live animal exports was a Labour Opposition motion, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East. Live animal exports were restarted on 16 January 1975, following the O'Brien report, with the support of the then Conservative Opposition spokesman on agriculture.

The House was thus misled by the allegation made by the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave). In such circumstances, how can hon. Members put the record straight?

Madam Speaker: There is always the Order Paper, either in the form of questions or of early-day motions. If the hon. Gentleman consults the Clerks, he may find other methods too—although he has already corrected the record.

Legal Aid and Advice

4.21 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): I beg to move,

That the draft Legal Aid Advisory Committee (Dissolution) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

This debate is at the behest of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and I have no dispute with that perfectly proper use of parliamentary time. Tempting though it may be to stray wider, I shall confine myself to the rather narrow subject of the order, which concerns the dissolution of the Legal Aid Advisory Committee.

In 1949, when the Committee was put in place, legal aid was operated under a very different regime: it was run by the Law Society. That may seem curious now, but it was true none the less. The profession ran the legal aid scheme.

With the passage of time, better ideas emerged, and in 1988 responsibility for administering legal aid passed to the newly constituted Legal Aid Board, which is independent of Government except in the higher reaches of policy. Many of the functions of the Legal Aid Advisory Committee passed to the Legal Aid Board at that time, so it was decided to retain the advisory committee for a transitional period, to see whether that was a fruitful idea.

The Lord Chancellor has had time to reflect since 1988, and has decided that the time has come to stand down the Legal Aid Advisory Committee, possessed as he is—as am I and as is the House—of no shortage of advice on legal aid. In all my adult life, I have never received as much advice on any other subject.

I have in my pocket a list of some of the bodies that give me and the Lord Chancellor advice on legal aid. In no particular order, they include: the Law Society, the Bar Council, Action for Victims of Medical Accidents, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers, the British Association of Social Workers, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Consumers Association, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Housing Law Practitioners Association, Justice, the Justices' Clerks Society, the Law Centres Federation, the Lawyers Christian Fellowship, the Legal Action Group, MIND, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the National Consumer Council, Relate, Shelter, the Solicitors Family Law Association, the Trades Union Congress—and so on, and so on. Not least, Members of Parliament offer advice on legal aid. Sometimes I think that all 651 are writing to me simultaneously. I should specially mention the Select Committee on Home Affairs. We are not short of advice.

Before I ask the House to debate and ultimately, I hope, accept the proposal to dissolve the committee, I would not wish to leave the Dispatch Box without thanking all those who have served the advisory committee for the dedicated and careful work that they have done. It is greatly appreciated.

4.24 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): It is a funny sort of appreciation that is followed by the dissolution of the body that has rendered valuable service. It is because we believe that the service is so valuable that we oppose the

exercise of the clause in the Legal Aid Act 1988 under which the Lord Chancellor seeks to dissolve the Legal Aid Advisory Committee. We opposed the clause when it was first initiated in the House. We oppose it now because we believe that the Lord Chancellor needs and ought to receive advice within a statutory framework on the exercise of his functions in relation to the provision of legal services.

It is clear from the timing of the measure what lies behind the Lord Chancellor's concerns. Indeed, it was reflected in the little list—or the long list—that the Minister trotted out during his rather brief justification of the measure. I think that the House, albeit a House in the early part of the afternoon, deserved a little more lengthy justification for the abolition of a body that has provided good service since 1949. *[Interruption.]* It will not do for Conservative Members, and the silent ones in particular, to suggest that the less time that is expended in discussing this matter the better. Opposition Members fear that what the Lord Chancellor and his acolyte here in the House are saying—

Mr. John M. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman made reference to my hon. Friend the silent one—my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood). My hon. Friend was drawing a different inference, and comparing the lengths of time that solicitors took to get to the point with that which barristers took to get to the point.

Mr. Boateng: The difference might be that some return to the point again and again. The Minister does just that. The point that he returns to again and again is that he and the Lord Chancellor can be trusted and that legal aid and legal services are safe in their hands.

The point of the little list was to reassure us that there is already a profusion of bodies all too willing—indeed, one suspects from what he had to say that they are a little too willing, in the Lord Chancellor's view—to give advice on the exercise of the Lord Chancellor's functions. There is a reason for that. There is widespread discontent out there among the consumers of legal services with the functions of the Lord Chancellor and the way in which they have been carried out.

There is widespread anxiety that the Lord Chancellor increasingly is more concerned with the dictates of the Treasury than with the interests of justice. That is why so many bodies and individuals write letters to the Minister and to the Lord Chancellor and make their way to the Lord Chancellor's Department. It is because of the state of crisis in the provision of legal services in Britain.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the committee which the Government plan to withdraw has some mystical quality that none of the other committees that my hon. Friend listed has? Is it because it is statutory that the Committee has some wonderful aura of giving the best advice? Is not the advice of all those other groups good enough? Is it the Opposition's view that the committee is perfect because it is a statutory committee, or because they want more and more committees?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman is a Member of some sophistication, and that intervention does not do him any justice. He knows very well that the importance of that committee lies in its statutory independence and the fact that it has no axe to grind.

Among the organisations on the Minister's list are some that certainly have an axe to grind. With all due respect to the Law Society, both it and the Bar Council are concerned, first and foremost, with the interests of the legal profession. The Opposition believe that the interests of justice and the provision of legal services are matters in which the consumer, and not the profession, should come first.

As a result, it is important for there to be a body, established by statute, that has the right to speak for the interests of the general public and the consumer of those services. That is why we intend to push this matter to a vote. The Lord Chancellor's actions are high-handed and contrary to the interests of justice and the consumer of legal services.

The timing of this motion is interesting, as it is within a week of a speech by the Lord Chancellor in which he outlined proposals—shortly to be canvassed in a Green Paper-that mark a dismantling of the legal aid system as we know it. With such proposals in mind—proposals instigated, first and foremost, by a desire to appease the Treasury—it is no wonder that the Lord Chancellor wishes to remove an independent committee that was established by statute to overlook his activities.

It is not the first time that the sabre has been rattled in that area, and the Government now propose not only to rattle it, but to slice off the offending limb. It was first rattled at a time when the Lord Chancellor's Department was again concerned about the dangers of an organisation that had shown that it was increasingly too independent-minded for the likes of those whose sole concern is to implement policy that has its roots elsewhere—in the interests not of justice, but of the Treasury.

The committee was an annoyance and an inconvenience to those persons within the Lord Chancellor's Department—not least, I regret to say, the Minister and the Lord Chancellor—who did not want to heed the strictures of bodies that show themselves to be robust and independent-minded and that clearly have no axe to grind.

Within weeks of the publication of the 40th report of the Lord Chancellor's Legal Aid Advisory Committee—a report that was highly critical of the cuts in eligibility for legal aid, the lack of resources applied to the research and study of such matters and of how legal services might be delivered more effectively—it was announced that the Lord Chancellor intended to abolish the committee.

Why? It is clear that there was a connection between the decision to abolish and the fact that the committee had become increasingly critical of the administration of legal aid and of the Lord Chancellor's policies towards it.

It is disingenuous for the Minister to come to the Dispatch Box and seek to rationalise and justify the Government's decision to abolish the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on the ground that we should not worry, because the Legal Aid Board can be relied on to provide the Lord Chancellor with all the advice and assistance he needs. As the Minister well knows, to describe the Legal Aid Board as "independent of the Lord Chancellor" is a misnomer. It is no such thing. To all intents and purposes, it is an executive agency of the Lord Chancellor's Department. Indeed, the Lord Chancellor's Department intends that, in due course, it should be so in its entirety.

[Mr. Boateng]

The Minister refers to the board's independence except at the higher reaches of policy. It is precisely the higher reaches of policy, and failures in them, that we are concerned about. Increasingly, the people of this country do not trust those concerned, because cuts in eligibility are having a detrimental impact on the lives of ordinary people of modest and moderate means.

They do not trust the Lord Chancellor in terms of the higher reaches of policy, and want a sharp and critical eye applied to those policies. They want a source of searching, independent and rigorous research. They do not want another quango, executive agency or arm of Government in all but name to be given unfettered power in that area. They and we believe that it is important that there be a voice for the consumer and those most directly affected by the impact of the current cuts in legal services.

May I briefly review the work of the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee? I hope that at least some Conservative Members will express an appreciation for what has already been done and give some clear undertakings and assurances on who will do that work in future. What did the 41st annual report, which was to be the last, of the Lord Chancellor's Legal Aid Advisory Committee have to contribute to the proper and effective delivery of legal services?

Let me mention just three points. Elizabeth Filkin, the chairman, said at the beginning of the report:

"Our work has shown that the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Legal Aid Board still have insufficient management information on which to base sound policy development."

In that context, and in the absence of such information, the Lord Chancellor felt it right to make certain observations to the seminar of the Social Market Foundation last week. We want to examine the consequences of that insufficient management information in terms of the development of policy.

In our dialogue with the Government on this issue, we have returned time and again to the underspend of the Lord Chancellor's Department, as have those many organisations referred to in the Minister's list. Elizabeth Filkin went on to refer to that underspend. She asked why more had not been done to improve access to legal aid, advice and assistance, thus utilising that underspend. That was a reasonable, proper question, but it is a difficult one for the Government, because they have no answer. That is why they want to abolish the committee that asked it.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): If the hon. Gentleman considers that such matters should properly have been drawn to the attention of the House and the public, is that not his job and that of his hon. Friends in Her Majesty's Opposition? Why does he need a quango to do his job for him?

Mr. Boateng: It never ceases to amaze me the extent to which the Government cannot abide any criticism or any examination of their policy. Perhaps it should not surprise me; perhaps I am long enough in the tooth and have had sufficient experience in the House—perhaps a little more than the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen)—to accept that behaviour. The Government always deride any such criticism or examination as being motivated by party political spite.

We can be absolutely sure of one thing: had my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) and I questioned the impact of the cuts in eligibility to legal aid and the impact of the underspend on the quality of legal services, we would have been told that we were addicted to public spending and exaggerating the problems for our own party political advantage. The Government, however, cannot attack the truth that is spoken in the report of the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee, because it is independent. So what do they do? They abolish it.

If the Government had their away, they would abolish all opposition. They would single a number of us out. I can see that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) is busy pointing his finger at me and my right hon. and learned Friend, or perhaps in my direction alone. That is typical of the hon. Gentleman, and I wear it as a badge of honour that I should have been singled out by the likes of him for personal abolition. I intend to survive a little longer.

It is a great pity that the advisory committee will not survive long enough to subject the Lord Chancellor's most recently vaunted proposals to the critical scrutiny and examination they deserve. The hon. Member for Shoreham, however, can be absolutely sure that the Opposition will subject them to such scrutiny. Even in the absence of the advisory committee, the mish-mash of half-baked, misconceived market solutions which the Lord Chancellor parades as policy to overcome the crisis in legal services will be revealed for what it is.

The advisory committee, an independent statutory body, referred to what it described as the

"limited improvements in legal aid eligibility"

which were announced by the Lord Chancellor in March of last year and implemented in April. Those improvements should not be subject to party political controversy.

Although the committee welcomed those improvements and gave them the credit they were due, it also pointed out that they fell short of a real-terms restoration of the cuts in eligibility to legal aid. The committee considered that to be a regrettable failure. The committee performed a valuable function by giving the changes their due credit, while at the same time pointing out, authoritatively and independently, their failings. All that work by the Committee is now to be put on one side.

It does not end there.

Mr. Steen: Oh dear.

Mr. Boateng: Such protests will not work. The Opposition have no intention of abrogating our responsibilities to legal aid, whatever the attitude of Conservative Members.

The hon. Member for Shoreham asked what useful function is carried out by the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee which could not be carried out by the Opposition. One such important function is to call conferences from time to time at which issues concerning the provision of legal services are considered in a non-partisan, academic, practical atmosphere.

In November of the year reported on in the advisory committee's 41st annual report, one such conference was held on reinventing legal aid. One would have thought that that project would have endeared the advisory committee to the Minister and his hon. Friends. Some of

the committee's proposals managed to achieve just that, so it is all the more surprising that it should have brought upon itself the descent of the sword of Damocles that has hung over it for so long.

One of the contributors to the committee's conference was no less a person than Professor Partington, who contributed to the report of the Social Market Foundation which found so much favour with the Minister and the Lord Chancellor. It did so because it was from that paper that the notion of capping regional budgets for legal aid arose. It is from that paper that the notion of fundholders—replicating in legal services the disastrous experience of the national health service—first sprang.

The Lord Chancellor's advisory committee performed a function that enabled a thousand flowers to bloom for legal aid and legal services, even though there were some weeds among them. It is unfortunate that the Lord Chancellor has chosen to pluck the weeds and not the flowers for his particular herbal remedy for legal services.

The committee nevertheless performed a valuable role. One does not have to agree with all its all conclusions and recommendations, but it is important that a body with a clear and independent voice and a specific statutory duty to report to the Lord Chancellor and to Parliament on measures to improve legal aid and legal services should exist.

The Opposition have been challenged by Conservative Members to take on the role of that committee. Have no fear; we shall perform a function providing just that place in which it is possible for ideas about improving services to grow, and to find succour and inspiration. We regard that as part of our role, and we shall fulfil it.

However, if Conservative Members believe that we shall do so in the non-partisan way that the Lord Chancellor's legal aid advisory committee was able to do, they have got another think coming, because we are partisan with regard to the provision of legal services.

We believe that people of moderate and modest means should have access to the law and lawyers. We believe that it is important that legal services should not be thought of simply as a matter for lawyers. We believe that there is, and should be, room for appropriate and alternative dispute resolution procedures. We believe that there should be room for properly trained and qualified mediators to provide advice and help about family law. We believe that there needs to be a new dispensation and a new impetus for a network of advice and law centres. We believe that it is important that the courts system and the legal profession be reformed, to put the interests of the consumer at the heart of their practices and procedures.

For the very reason that we believe that all those things are important, and that the consumer should come first, we oppose the abolition of the committee, and we shall continue to cry out first and foremost for the interests of the consumer and the interests of justice. We shall continue to cry out when we notice the Government motivated by a desire, first and foremost, to appease the Treasury and undermine the interests of justice that they should properly uphold.

4.51 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) has spent about 25 minutes justifying an organisation that, in my experience in my professional life—and, I suggest, possibly in his—bore not the slightest relevance to anything that we had been doing year after year. Perhaps, when the hon. Gentleman was at the Bar, it was fundamental to the way in which he worked and the way that his clients were served. I found that that was not the case when I was active in the law. I therefore have great pleasure in supporting the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Minister that that quango be dissolved. I do not think that there will be a great loss to the community or the consumer.

Mr. Steen: Has my hon. Friend any idea what the committee costs? The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) did not mention that. I think that it is of relevance.

Mr. Alexander: I was going to discuss that subject and suggest, if I were to make any criticism of my hon. Friend the Minister's admirable short address, that the amount of money spent on the committee for many years, compared with the results that it achieved, would have been a helpful statistic to produce in persuading hon. Members, especially on the Conservative Benches, of the need for the committee.

Mr. Boateng *rose—*

Mr. Alexander: I venture to suggest that, if the Opposition had been on the Government side of the House, they would have made a similar proposal at this time in Parliament, but I am happy to give way.

Mr. Boateng: The cost of the committee in the last year for which we have figures was, I believe, £59,500. Members of the committee are unpaid. They give of their valuable time freely, and it is beneath contempt that Conservative Members should suggest that £59,500 was not well worth spending.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is of an altogether different order of magnitude; actually, it is £70,000.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. We cannot have one intervention upon another.

Mr. Alexander: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister, and to the hon. Member for Brent, South, for clearing that matter up. Even if it is £59,000, one has to say to Members—

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Seventy thousand pounds.

Mr. Alexander: I accept that, but I am taking the point made by the hon. Member for Brent, South. One has to ask, "What have we got for that committee over the years?" It is not a total of £59,000 over many years.

On such occasions, the Opposition always dress up such organisations as a voice for the consumer. Many hon. Members who are in the Chamber for the debate are, or have been, professional lawyers. I return to my original argument that there is no foundation in reality for thinking of the Legal Aid Advisory Committee as a voice for the consumer in the way that legal aid has operated for many years.

Labour will always say that those things are Treasury-driven. I return to my point—the matter is common sense-driven, and anyone considering that organisation, whether it costs £59,000 or £70,000 a year,

[Mr. Alexander]

is obliged to ask what the justification is for the continuation of yet another quango, especially in the legal field today.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has brought forward the statutory instrument this afternoon. It will have my support, and I should be astonished if many Labour Members who knew anything about it voted it down.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Labour Members have repeatedly said that the Labour party has decided that it now also wants to pursue a policy of low taxation. Is my hon. Friend therefore surprised that, although Labour Members speak about low taxation, they are willing to throw the taxpayer's money willy-nilly at unnecessary quangos?

Mr. Boateng: Wrong day, wrong debate.

Mr. Alexander: No inconsistency of the Opposition surprises me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Minister, in his admirable introduction, said that he would avoid the temptation to expound further on his introductory remarks. I should have liked to tempt him to tell us something, if he could, about what use the committee has served over the years. The hon. Member for Brent, South dragged out one or two odd things—I think that he mentioned a conference. A quango was not needed to organise a conference on the future of legal aid. If the entire body of the Opposition is to march through the Lobbies for that quango this afternoon, we need to know its purpose, how it can be justified for the continuing consumer and what it has done to justify the years of spending.

I should have preferred that organisation, if it had any common sense, and any grounding in the way that legal aid—especially civil legal aid—has operated for years, to examine the way that legal aid committees operate in the localities. I served on such a locality committee for some years before I came to the House, and I was happy to do so.

However, if someone with a dodgy case applies for legal aid, it is not for the local committee of solicitors to turn the application down, and the marginal, dodgy case always gets through. That means that someone with a doubtful case, having been granted legal aid, is immediately given the advice of a solicitor, who obviously is entitled to instruct counsel—often senior, and expensive, counsel. Professional advisers are then appointed. The person never goes to the most reasonably priced estate agent or accountant, but instead goes right to the top of the tree.

That may be fair in one respect, but the Legal Aid Advisory Committee never considered the effect on the non-legally aided defendant, who has before him or her a barrage of legal and professional advice of the utmost expense. In those circumstances, unless he is absolutely convinced that the High Court will in no circumstances find against him, he must give in. He has to admit liability and, following from that, costs are awarded against him.

Over the years, the civil legal aid system has been geared against the non-legally aided person, whether the plaintiff or defendant. One of the fundamental flaws and one of the most unjust aspects of the legal aid system has had no attention from the advisory committee. If it does not attend to something as fundamental as that, what does it attend to?

Mr. Stephen: To the knowledge of my hon. Friend, has the committee ever drawn attention to the scandal of foreigners coming here and litigating their civil disputes at the expense of the British taxpayer?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I have raised the matter on the Floor of the House with the Leader of the House, who has promised to look into it. No doubt he is currently doing so, but my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) is right—so often an applicant for legal aid who comes from abroad and whose means cannot be easily identified is given legal aid, while the country from which he come allows no such reciprocal arrangement. That is a perfect example of how flaws in the legal aid system—which we all support—are not picked up by the so-called advisory committee.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, but I wanted to intervene before he completed his admirable speech. There is now in circulation a consultative paper called "Legal Aid for the Apparently Wealthy". Chapter 5, on the subject of legal aid for those who are not citizens of the United Kingdom, addresses my hon. Friend's last point, and my hon. Friend might want to make a submission to the paper.

Mr. Alexander: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. I am doubtful—my hon. Friend will no doubt correct me if I am wrong—whether the paper was drafted, or even promoted or suggested, by the committee that we are proposing to abolish. That is the sort of action that the committee should be taking, but which it has never, in all its years of existence, taken.

The advisory committee is of no relevance to our profession. I am watching the response of the hon. Member for Brent, South, and know that he agrees—

Mr. Boateng: Oh, come off it.

Mr. Alexander: The committee has no advantages for the profession or the consumer, but is just another small added cost to the taxpayer. I have pleasure in supporting the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary that we abolish it today.

5.2 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Conservative Members seem to think that they are discussing an action that the Lord Chancellor will take if the order is approved today. However, they are attending a long-delayed funeral, as the committee has not met for months. Its secretariat member has already been returned to the Lord Chancellor's Office and the committee has effectively been abolished by executive action. Hon. Members have come to the House to validate that action.

I can tell the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) that one of the most trenchant recommendations of the advisory committee while it was in operation was precisely concerned with the plight of people who were not legally aided. It was concerned with the dramatic increase in the number of people who would not be eligible for legal aid that would result from the change in the eligibility criteria. It gave forceful advice on the subject which, one hopes, influenced subsequent decisions of the Lord Chancellor.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the force of the committee's advice on that occasion set in train in the Lord Chancellor's Office a dislike of the committee. In January 1993 the committee said:

"The committee appreciates the financial pressures to which you are subject but is concerned that the removal of substantial numbers of individuals from eligibility for legal aid and advice together with the increases in contributions will damage the access to justice which legal aid is designed to provide. We are very deeply concerned at the proposals to make savings by restricting the consumer's access to justice where alternatives are available."

That seems to be how the committee should properly exercise its responsibility. It should see whether the legal aid system provides the access to justice that it should and whether changes to the system would deny access to justice. The committee did not make itself popular by doing that.

One of the anxieties that so many of us have about the world of quangos and organisations appointed by Ministers is that their members constantly look over their shoulders, wary of the possibility that if they give forceful advice that is critical of Government policy they will not, as individuals, be re-appointed or even that the organisation of which they are members will disappear entirely. The case that we are discussing appears to give some weight to that fear. I wonder what Ministers can do to dispel the feeling that if a committee gives unwelcome advice to the Government, it may not last long.

It is surprising, on any other grounds, that the committee's abolition should take place when there is widespread debate about the future structure of legal aid. The committee has encouraged some of that debate, the Lord Chancellor has encouraged other aspects of it and various outside bodies have participated in it. I welcome the Lord Chancellor's publication of the paper on legal aid for the apparently wealthy. It is a useful document and I agree with many of its suggestions. On page after page it invites advice and comment and I see no reason why the legal aid advisory committee should not have remained in existence while that debate took place.

The Lord Chancellor specifically wants advice on whether he should proceed on a number of changes to restrict the eligibility for legal aid of people who appear to have a rich lifestyle or substantial housing assets, far beyond the reach of most ordinary people. The paper also covers the subject of foreign citizens gaining access to the legal aid system. It contains many issues on which advice is sought.

The Lord Chancellor has encouraged debate on why there are changes to the legal aid system, including issues such as cash limiting, fund holding, contracting, contingency payments and no-win, no-fee payments and their relevance to the future of legal aid. Those are all important issues and it would have been useful to have had a co-ordinated route of advice through the legal aid advisory committee. The Chancellor invites debate yet removes one of the organisations that would have had a legitimate part to play in that debate.

Legal aid is crucial to access to justice. Justice is an expensive commodity and beyond the reach of many people if they cannot get legal aid. There remains the problem of those with reasonable or significant means, but for whom legal action is out of the question because of the scale of costs involved and the amount of risk involved—for example, in defending an action against them. That is particularly true in matters of civil dispute.

In his contributions to the debate, the Lord Chancellor said that in criminal matters the accused person has the weight of the state prosecution system and all the means at the state's disposal against him or her, so is in particular need of high-quality advice. Justice is not served if the defendant is ill advised and the state is well advised. There are some cases when, despite all the money spent, the reverse seems to be true. Justice is not served if defendants are badly advised and represented. Many more problems arise for the judicial system when mistakes are made as a result of such imbalances in the system.

The legal aid system is extremely important and it is reasonable that we should have a body advising on it. It may be judged that the committee is not that useful in the longer term and can be replaced by direct channels of advice from all the relevant bodies that the Parliamentary Secretary has mentioned. But at this time, when the issue of legal aid is being so heavily debated, it seems strange to get rid of the advisory committee. It is significant that that committee should have been forcefully critical of earlier Government proposals.

5.9 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): An interesting phenomenon has occurred this afternoon. Labour seems to be becoming the party of the status quo. Labour Members do not like change; they are in fact extremely conservative, believing that because a body has been set up it must continue in perpetuity. The Conservative party, meanwhile, has become the radical party: we believe that we should consider the possibility of change.

That phenomenon was well illustrated by the opening speeches. The Parliamentary Secretary made an extremely short, pertinent speech, using his time to the maximum; unfortunately, the sophisticated hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) made an extraordinarily lengthy speech—the kind of speech that could well be made in the committee whose existence he wishes to continue. It was good-humoured and useful, but it did not add much. It is always nice to hear the hon. Gentleman speak, however, because we know that he will not make a very pertinent or useful contribution.

The debate is not really about a statutory committee, although the hon. Member for Brent, South rightly put me in my place when I raised that point. There is no limit to the amount of advice available to the Parliamentary Secretary: I, for instance, have been advising him for years, although he does not always take my points. We have a Parliamentary Secretary precisely so that he can take all the advice that he needs, after which he must make the necessary decision with the Lord Chancellor. I do not begrudge him that task, which is very difficult, but I do not believe that another committee will help him much.

Oddly enough, the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994, which was passed in the most recent Session of Parliament and of which I was a great supporter, is intended to reduce the number of rules and regulations. I believe that the Government made one mistake, however: they should have included a clause reducing the number of committees. We have far too many of them. The House of Commons, for instance, probably has more Committees than any other organisation in the country.

Furthermore, every time a committee sits, meetings must be held, and the trouble with meetings is that they need staff. The Parliamentary Secretary is, in fact, doing

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

something extremely profound: he is actually trying to reduce the number of committees. The Labour party, however, immediately said, "We must have a committee; if we do not have a committee, what shall we do?" I welcome the Government's move, if for no other reason than that it will reduce the number of people who sit around tables talking when they could be doing many much more useful things.

Mr. Stephen: Did my hon. Friend observe that the Opposition rather pooh-poohed the amount of money involved, which is £69,000 or £70,000? Does that not give some idea of their attitude to public spending? Would the money not be better spent on delivering legal aid to people who need it, or even on hospitals or schools?

Mr. Steen: I do not want to be drawn into that argument. The sum involved is modest; the question is whether it is doing any good. If the Parliamentary Secretary—an enormously experienced lawyer for whom Conservative Members have the highest regard—says that it is not helping him or the Lord Chancellor, I must have regard to what he says.

There is no limit to the amount of money that the public can find, and unfortunately this amount is only a drop in the ocean. The legal aid fund currently spends some £1.5 billion a year. The sum, I believe, is less relevant than the issue, which is that too many committees and staff are involved in non-productive work. We need a new Bill, which I should be happy to promote: the Reduction in the Number of Committees Bill.

The legal aid system needs a complete overhaul. I have written to the Parliamentary Secretary a great deal on the subject. We seem to be over-concerned about the rich, but in fact there are few very rich people left; what we have are a good many people who receive legal aid and who are very poor. We should not forget that. We need a discussion paper about legal aid for the very poor, as well as about legal aid for the very rich. The very poor need legal aid, but when they receive it, it may have a counter-productive effect, in that the plaintiff must reconsider his position and decide whether he should proceed.

Mr. Deva: Rich people have access to justice because they can hire all the best lawyers, with or without legal aid, while the legal aid system also helps the very poor. It is those in between—people like us—who find it difficult to gain access to justice, because it is harder for them to obtain legal aid. Being sued, or having to sue, will mean putting their homes and their children's futures at risk. It is the middle classes—if I may use that term—whose access to justice we need to improve.

Mr. Steen *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues his speech, may I warn him against pursuing that intervention too far? We are not debating the merits of legal aid as such; we are debating the merits or otherwise of getting rid of an advisory committee.

Mr. Steen: I am always guided by your helpful rulings, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will not be drawn into that argument, although I think that the House appreciated the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva).

Our debate has been slightly wider than the subject of the committee, because the committee covers a wide area of activity. I was simply saying that, as the committee itself has pointed out, there has been a great deal of distortion in the legal aid system. Once a litigant receives legal aid, the balance of justice is distorted because his decision whether to proceed has been affected. I believe that that is true of criminal as well as civil cases. Someone charged with a criminal offence should not presume that he cannot afford to defend himself; many criminals, in fact, can afford to defend themselves, and should not automatically receive legal aid.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems with the legal aid system is that large sums are spent on the legal costs of cases whose subject matter is relatively small? Surely we must consider raising the arbitration limits and putting much more effort into mediation. Perhaps we should examine some of the Med/Arb schemes that are so popular in America.

Mr. Steen *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I see another temptation for the hon. Gentleman. We must not go down that road. This is not a general debate on legal aid; it must relate to the advisability or otherwise of washing the committee out of existence.

Mr. Steen: I hear what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker. I merely wish to point out—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not want the hon. Gentleman to "hear what I say"; I want him to follow my instructions.

Mr. Steen: The criticism that you are making, Madam Deputy Speaker, is not—I am glad to say—of my speech, but of the interventions. You are presuming that I shall respond to them in a way that you will not like, but I assure you that that is not so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let me be blunt. The hon. Gentleman was already going down that path, and I was trying to be kind to him, which was clearly a mistake. I shall be blunter next time.

Mr. Steen: I do not wish to incur your wrath, Madam Deputy Speaker, but merely earn your good humour. I was simply going to say something that I now will not say. What I will say is that the committee should have taken into account the effect of legal aid on civil cases. It should have recognised that, because so many civil cases now involved legal aid, the administration of the courts was being blocked. So much legally aided litigation is passing through the courts that the administration of justice, especially in county courts, is not as efficient and effective as it should be. That is something that the committee, mistakenly, did not consider. It should have put it right, but, of course, it cannot now do so as it is being wound up.

The House will be amazed to learn that 3.5 million people, or one seventh of the entire working population, received legal aid in this financial year. As has been mentioned, the cost is £1.6 billion, which is approaching the total sum collected in excise duties on the nation's alcohol.

I remind the Minister that the legal aid system is nearly out of control—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. So is the hon. Gentleman. I remind him for the last time that he must stick to the point at issue. This is not a general debate on legal aid. If he strays, I shall have to ask him to resume his seat.

Mr. Steen: Labour's Front-Bench spokesman spoke for 25 minutes about the legal aid system. I feel—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) may have done as the hon. Gentleman says but he did so in relation to the existence or otherwise of the advisory committee. That is the distinction, and I would expect those who are legally trained to understand that distinction.

Mr. Steen: Of course I understand the distinction. I am talking about the legal aid system in relation to the committee's report. I do not feel that I should have to preface every remark with a comment about the report. Labour's Front-Bench spokesman did not mention it more than once or twice so I feel that it is perhaps slightly unfair to penalise a Tory Back Bencher when the Labour Front Bencher was allowed to range widely over various subjects.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Brent, South may have ranged widely but his remarks related to the advisability or otherwise of the dissolution of the committee. That is my sole concern and that is the point that I am trying to make to the hon. Gentleman, although it seems hard to get through to him.

Mr. Steen: You got through to me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I think that it is probably a slightly unfair comment. In any event, I shall now continue referring to the report.

I practised as a barrister. I know many solicitors and barristers who survive thanks to legal aid funds and the help of the committee. I welcome the reduction in bureaucracy that will flow from the demise of the committee but it seems to be a drop in the ocean and might perhaps be gloriously irrelevant.

We should be appalled by the amount of money spent overall on the legal aid fund and the committee but, instead, we seem to have had little regard for the enormous sums spent merely to distort the marketplace, which is what the legal aid fund and the committee have been doing. They distort the way in which people litigate.

Only last night we debated the distortion of the fishing market by the intervention of the Spanish fleet. In the same way, the committee and the legal aid fund have distorted the marketplace and any balance in matters of justice. My party is the party of the market force but I am convinced that the committee and its recommendations tended to distort. We shall correct that distortion by getting rid of the committee today.

In many ways, the whole debate is mistaken. It is a supreme irony that the winding up of a committee should take time on the Floor of the House. Furthermore, we usually proceed by using statutory instruments, of which there were more than 2,000 last year. Why could we not wind up this committee in the same way? Why do we need a debate lasting one and a half hours, with me talking for far too long?

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Opposition asked for it.

Mr. Steen: The Minister tells me that the only reason why we are holding this debate is that the Labour party asked for it but it would be much simpler to dissolve the committee without bringing the issue to the Floor of the House. That gives me an idea for another good Bill that I could introduce, one on ways to dissolve committees without bringing the matter to the Floor of the House.

I hope that you feel that in my closing remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker, I followed your strictures and that my colleagues and Opposition Members will listen carefully to what you told me.

5.24 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I appreciate the fact that we must relate our comments to the advisory committee and I begin by quarrelling with part of the analysis of the reasons for abolishing the committee.

The Legal Aid Board is, of course, responsible for the administration of the legal aid system. It works fairly well and innovatively and accepts a wide range of representations. In a sense, the Legal Aid Board's administrative functions can replace those of the advisory committee but the House needs to be absolutely clear about the fact that many of the parameters that determine the way in which legal aid works are decided not by the Legal Aid Board but by the Lord Chancellor and his Treasury-driven ambition to cash limit the amount spent on legal aid. It is on the matters over which he has some control that I would argue that he should not be a judge, sitting on his own. We do not allow him to be a judge, sitting on his own, on the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords and we should not allow him to be a judge sitting on his own of other matters for which he determines the scope of legal aid.

Let me cite some examples. If an old lady in my constituency trips over a pavement and qualifies for only £999 in damages instead of £1,000, it is the Lord Chancellor who decides that she shall not receive legal aid. A statutory committee is required to advise the Lord Chancellor on such an issue. The committee should also publish its report, which is bound to be authoritative, for use by outside bodies and Members of Parliament.

The Lord Chancellor decides the eligibility for legal aid by, for example, excluding anyone from legal advice whose income is above the income support limit. That involves the exclusion of millions of people which is a crucial matter on which he should have advice from a committee because of the widespread effect on the rights of ordinary citizens. Those rights have been encouraged by the citizens charter but their exercise is discouraged by the absence of any assistance.

The Lord Chancellor also decides the rates of payment and remuneration for legal aid practitioners.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Quite right, too.

Mr. Fraser: Of course, the Lord Chancellor sets them at between half and one third of commercial rates. The Minister may be in favour of that, too, but if the rates are driven down to such an extent two legal professions will

[Mr. Fraser]

be created, which will be to the disadvantage of those who want to exercise their legal rights. That is another example of where the Lord Chancellor should at least take advice.

One way to reduce the cost of legal aid, which I know is on the Minister's mind, would be to change the procedures or to use different ones such as mediation and conciliation. A great deal of money is spent on legal aid for tenants suing their landlords for damages in the county court, which is a lengthy procedure. It would be much cheaper and simpler if there were legal aid for proceedings in magistrates courts under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Such matters are determined by the Lord Chancellor—

Mr. Stephen *rose—*

Mr. Fraser: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall not give way because time is short.

There are two final issues on which it is extraordinarily important that the Lord Chancellor receives advice. The first involves legal aid for criminal proceedings. I am referring to criminal proceedings in the Crown court, in which, incidentally, the Legal Aid Board has no involvement and over which the Lord Chancellor has very little control because the rates of payment are determined by the courts and the grant of certificate is determined by the Crown court. Criminal legal aid covering magistrates courts, attendance as a duty solicitor at a magistrates court and attendance at police stations—the figure excludes Crown courts—covers 30 per cent. of all expenditure.

I believe that the amount in the Crown courts is considerably higher. The matter on which the Lord Chancellor should take advice is the proposition that the cash limiting of civil legal aid should be completely decoupled from the amount spent on criminal legal aid.

Crime has doubled since 1979 and the growth in crime has increased the expenditure on criminal legal aid. If we have cash limits, we limit legal aid for someone who wants civil legal aid. I give an example of how that could happen. Let us suppose that a woman has been assaulted by a burglar who has committed many offences and who gets legal aid. Apart from finding that the amount she gets from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board is reduced, the woman could find herself unable to get legal aid for an accident that she suffers because she is uncertain and unsteady as a result of the burglary because so much more money has to be spent on the burglar's defence.

It is extraordinary that we take money away from the victims of crime and then spend it on defending people most of whom, in the magistrates court, turn out to be guilty of the crime. The committee should be asked its view about whether legal aid should be totally decoupled in terms of criminal legal aid and civil legal aid.

The other matter on which the committee's advice should be sought is the extent to which the Government should be responsible for paying for the consequences of their own changes in procedure. Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the attendance of lawyers at police stations and the attendance of lawyers at magistrates courts pushed up the legal aid budget, as it was bound to do. The Government are now trying to cash limit the civil side because—

Mr. Stephen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is this not a thinly disguised canter around the whole course of legal aid? Should not the hon. Gentleman be brought to order?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can safely leave it to me. I have been following the arguments closely. The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) is giving various examples of why he feels that the committee should remain in existence. It was equally open to Conservative Members or to any other hon. Member to employ the same tactics, if one wants to put it that way, in exactly the same way. The fact that other hon. Members did not do so is not my fault.

Mr. Fraser: I was saying that the Police and Criminal Evidence Act has pushed up the cost. There is a new issue on which the Lord Chancellor should ask the advisory committee to advise. Under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, the right of silence will be abolished at the beginning of April. There will be a requirement on somebody charged with a criminal offence to give an explanation of his behaviour or the circumstances under which he was apprehended. Under the Act, if he fails to do that when he has been cautioned by a police officer, that can be evidence against him at his trial.

The consequence is that it is even more important that everybody being interviewed at a police station is represented by a lawyer. It will no longer be enough for a lawyer, when phoned up, to say, "You need not say anything. I will see you the next day." That is an issue—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is an issue that seems to be going rather far away from the hon. Gentleman's original proposition. I advise him to align his remarks on this example more closely to the order.

Mr. Fraser: You have a habit, Madam Deputy Speaker, of sometimes taking the words straight out of my mouth. I was about to finish the sentence by saying that that is the sort of issue on which the advice of the advisory committee should be taken because it will have a crucial effect on legal aid. It would be scandalous if the removal of the right of silence led not only to injustices in the criminal courts, but to people with civil matters to press being deprived of assistance.

The committee's advice and the Government's policy should be to ensure that when we grant people civil and legal rights, they are capable of enforcement. The Government's proposal is a weakening of that position.

5.33 pm

Mr. John M. Taylor: By leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate. I should like the House to imagine for a moment that instead of coming here to dissolve the committee, I have come to create a new advisory committee. My hon. Friends may deny it, but they would be looking sullen. They would not be happy and they would probably go to the Tea Room instead of sitting here. The Opposition would be shrieking and accusing me of stacking the committee with Tory placemen—*[Interruption.]* They would. That is exactly what would happen.

The hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) spoke for longer than I did, although he spoke in a good-humoured way. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander) in many ways made the points that I should like to have made. I know that I am not allowed to quote from *Hansard* for another place. I point out, however, that there is quite a good synopsis on the utility of the committee at column 693 of the *Official Report, House of Lords* of 30 November. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor refers to his own conclusion about the committee, which was transitionally retained after the Legal Aid Act 1988. My right hon. Friend had a look at it, gave it a fair trial and decided that it was time for it to go.

I assure the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that the Lord Chancellor's Department is far from being short of unwelcome advice; it is part of our daily bread. The right hon. Gentleman reviewed the agenda fairly and comprehensively.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) spoke for all of us who like to think that we are radicals and deregulators. He is right to say that he advises me often enough. I wonder whether he is attracted, as I am, by the practice of the United States Congress. The Americans have what is called the "sundown" clause. In any instrument setting up a committee, there is a final clause that says when the committee will expire; all committees have their own expiry built into them. That would stop us returning to all the statutory instruments. Does that idea commend itself to my hon. Friend?

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend suggesting built-in obsolescence? When one sets up a committee, would it cease immediately at its expiry date unless there was an affirmative proposal for it to continue? Is that what my hon. Friend has in mind?

Mr. Taylor: That is exactly what I have in mind. Does my hon. Friend approve?

Mr. Steen: Very much.

Mr. Taylor: Good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) reminded us in an intervention of the original sin of any benefits system. The rich do not need it and the poor qualify, but there is a group in the middle. We all know that from representing our constituents.

The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), whose views in these matters I have always respected, chased a Treasury phantom a couple of times round the Chamber. Nothing he said in that sense was compatible with the rate of growth of legal aid expenditure, which is little short of exponential. I am, however, sympathetic to other methods of dispute resolution and I join him in that. I am also sympathetic to any effort to separate conceptually criminal legal aid from civil legal aid because they are not the same thing, as he and I know.

I hope that I have done justice to the comments of right hon. and hon. Members in this debate. I have tried to address the points at issue. I am confident that I am right in recommending that the House agrees to the order.

5.38 pm

Mr. Boateng: The confidence—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask leave of the House.

Mr. Boateng: By leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker. The confidence that the Minister has in his own judgment is not shared by the Opposition. We are gravely disappointed by his failure to take on board the points that we have sought to make or, indeed, to be fair, some of the points made by his hon. Friends, however recent their arrival in the Chamber this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) did not grace us with his presence at the outset of the debate, but he did not feel constrained from making a highly mischievous intervention, which was entirely in character. We heard from him and from the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) the true voice of the Conservative party on these issues. We saw the true faces and neither of them was particularly pretty.

The comments by the hon. Members for South Hams and for Brentford and Isleworth were in stark contrast to the mellifluous tones, albeit somewhat excitable towards the end, of the Minister. They suggested that somehow publicly-funded legal services and legal aid were a distortion of the market. That was the most incredible statement because it clearly revealed the belief that not only poor people, but people of moderate and modest means, about whom the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth purported to be concerned, should not be able to look to central funds and should not be able to look to a committee such as the legal aid advisory committee to advise the Lord Chancellor to ensure that the legal aid system holds the ring for justice in the adversarial process envisaged in our legal procedures.

The Minister said that the Lord Chancellor had given the committee a fair trial and had decided to dispense with it. When did that trial take place? Who was the counsel for the prosecution and who for the defence? We know who the solicitor for the prosecution was—no lesser person than the Minister himself, who clearly has it in for the committee. One can understand why—because the committee is tackling issues which are embarrassing to Conservative Members.

The committee is tackling the issue of the failure of the market system, albeit it ameliorated in its more extreme forms by the existence of a legal aid system, to provide quality access to justice for all our people and to give people of modest and moderate means, be they—I shall use the class terms now adopted by Conservatives Members, especially by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth—members of the middle class or the working class, access to justice. At the moment, all too many ordinary working people and people of modest and moderate means are denied that access. It is right that we should look to a Lord Chancellor's advisory committee.

Conservatives Members—one hon. Member in particular—asked what the committee does that is so worth while and worth preserving. The committee, after all, talks of waste. Is that not important? Is it not important to highlight waste in the legal aid system? Is it not rather important to commission research into how solicitors deliver a service? That was precisely why the committee commissioned Wolfson college, so that the management information, so balefully lacking in the Lord

[Mr. Boateng]

Chancellor's Department, was provided and so that action to curb waste was taken and taken effectively. Is there a Conservative Member who will rise from his seat to oppose that? Not a sound.

If the committee is not doing that—

Mr. Stephen *rose—*

Mr. Deva *rose—*

Mr. Boateng: I may have been tempting fate. Indeed, I was tempting fate, but I shall proceed.

Mr. Stephen *rose—*

Mr. Deva *rose—*

Mr. Boateng: Well, I shall let one voice be heard.

Mr. Deva: If the committee is so marvellous, as the hon. Gentleman claims, why, in another breath, does he say that nothing works properly in the legal aid system?

Mr. Boateng: Because the Lord Chancellor will not listen to the committee; because the Lord Chancellor time and again turns a deaf ear and a blind eye to the manifest inadequacies of the system; because the Lord Chancellor time and again seeks to impose an ideologically driven, market-led, Treasury-inspired package of solutions to the crises that exist in access to justice and delivery of legal services.

We shall push this matter to a Division. We believe that the committee ought to have been kept in existence. We believe, indeed, that its powers and its resources ought to have been strengthened to make it a more efficient watchdog of the public purse and to enable it more effectively to protect and to preserve the interests of the consumer from the deprivations of the Treasury-inspired solutions that have brought us to the crisis which besets the courts and the legal aid system.

We will oppose the motion and we shall continue to oppose the Lord Chancellor as he seeks to undermine the legal aid system and as he seeks to deny people of modest and moderate means the access to justice that is their due.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 150.

Division No. 42] **[5.44 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Delvin, Tim
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*

Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, Hl)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Estelle Morris and
Tessa Jowell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Legal Aid Advisory Committee (Dissolution) Order 1994, which was laid before this House on 16th November, be approved.

Agriculture

5.58 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): I beg to move,

That the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) (No. 2) Scheme 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3002), dated 25th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With this it will be convenient to consider motion No. 3 in the name of the Leader of the Opposition:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Farm and Conservation Grant (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3003), dated 25th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be annulled.

Mr. Jack: This debate deals with developments affecting the farm and conservation grant scheme. The House may recall that, on 29 November last year, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced the outcome of the 1994 public expenditure round as it affected agriculture, saying:

"Against the background of an extremely demanding public expenditure round I am delighted that resources have been found to support farming enterprises in the six Objective 5(b) areas in England".

Although he found some extra resources for this task, savings had to be found from capital grants to fund our new programme. It is on those capital grants that the debate will concentrate.

These two short instruments, the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) (No. 2) Scheme 1994 and the Farm and Conservation Grant (Amendment) Regulations 1994, came into effect on 30 November last year. They end the availability of grants to farmers for waste handling measures. However, let me reassure the House that where a commitment to provide waste facilities before 30 November 1994 can be shown, or where a farmer has a current improvement plan which includes such facilities, claims will still be accepted.

The grant scheme which we are ending has exceeded our original expectations. When the scheme was introduced in 1989, the then Minister announced a provision of up to £50 million over three years for waste handling facilities in recognition of the need to tackle the problem of farm waste pollution. In fact, since the scheme's inception, more than £150 million has been paid in grants to farmers in the United Kingdom for the installation or improvement of waste handling facilities, valued in total at about £300 million.

In England and Wales, 11,500 farmers have benefited. The scheme's effectiveness is mirrored by the fact that, in 1988, the year before the scheme was introduced, there were 940 serious agricultural pollution incidents. In 1993, only 63 major incidents were reported. However, we acknowledge that particular difficulties may be experienced by farmers in areas that will be designated as nitrate-vulnerable zones, and I can confirm that it is our intention to provide assistance to farmers in those areas for waste handling measures.

We want to help farmers to maintain high standards of pollution control. To that end, free pollution advice and help in the preparation of farm waste management plans will continue to be available. That will be backed up by the codes of practice for the protection of soil, water and

[Mr. Jack]

air, which give sound advice and guidance on how to avoid pollution. Moreover, we are continuing to invest around £2 million a year in research programmes designed to help farmers to manage farm wastes.

The farm and conservation grant scheme also provides help with the provision, replacement and improvement of hedges, traditional walls and banks, and the repair or reinstatement of traditional buildings. That help will continue, with about £8 million of grants in England, Scotland and Wales until February 1996, when the scheme will expire, and we will consider how best to continue that work in the light of the transfer of the Countryside Commission's stewardship arrangements to our Ministry. I commend the measures to the House.

6.1 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The measures, as the Minister said, end grants for facilities for handling the storage and treatment of agricultural effluent and waste and related fixed disposal schemes. The grant scheme has been useful. As the Minister outlined, agricultural pollution has been a major source of river pollution. When I looked at the figures recently, I was surprised by the high proportion of pollution incidents that have been attributed to agricultural run-off, particularly in the south-west, where there are many dairy farms.

There is no doubt that organisations such as the National Farmers Union have done much to support farmers in developing, for example, management advice on controlling pollution from slurry and from the animal livestock industry. The Agricultural Development and Advisory Service has also played a valuable role. It is a great shame that ADAS is to be privatised, because it has provided great support for the agricultural sector over the years. Many farmers would find it difficult to buy such expertise and support. In terms of the support which the agricultural sector receives, farmers should expect research and development advice from bodies such as ADAS. I fear that in future such advice will be denied to many farmers.

The grants were reduced from 50 per cent. in 1989, when the scheme was introduced, to 25 per cent. in 1993. That was obviously a clear signal that they would be phased out. I have no doubt that they are being phased out as part of the Ministry's obligation to the Treasury, as the Minister said, so that the Treasury can accumulate money and can bribe the electorate with their own money and offer tax cuts at the next general election.

There has been excellent uptake of the scheme. The figures show that £64,000 was granted in 1989, rising to £23.4 million at its peak, and declining slightly to £21.1 million in 1992-93. The scheme's success can be seen in the decline in the overall number of pollution incidents. The overall pollution figures show that there were 4,441 incidents in 1988, declining to 2,883 in 1993. The involvement of dairy and beef farmers in those pollution incidents was about a third—35 per cent. in 1988 and 32 per cent. in 1993.

The National Rivers Authority concludes that the issues at which the grants are aimed—the containment of slurry and silage liquors, which are very powerful pollutants, and the failure of storage areas—are the main causes of agricultural pollution incidents. I am sure that the Minister will agree that we need high-quality aquatic habitats and that such habitats are threatened. Many of the cleanest rivers are under great pressure from all kinds of pollution, not just agricultural pollution. Indeed, they are also under pressure from water abstraction. Chalk rivers are also under pressure.

Pressure on the unspoilt and cleanest water environments has been demonstrated by the decline of the otter. I am glad that the otter is making a comeback in certain parts of the country. That is a tribute to reintroduction programmes, conservation bodies and better pollution control. We have seen the decline of the dipper, which is linked to the greater acidity of water, and the decline of trout in certain streams. Those declines are important also as bio-indicators of the health of our country and of our aquatic environment. The scheme has been effective in reducing that problem when subsidies are rightly under scrutiny in the agricultural sector and the common agricultural policy is under review, not least by today's Euro-rebels' manifesto.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What does it say?

Mr. Morley: The Euro-rebels' manifesto stressed the need to reform agriculture and fishing. They called for the return of control to individual countries in respect of agriculture and fishing. I do not know whether the Euro-rebels' condition will be that the manifesto must be accepted by the Government before they allow themselves to be readmitted. We await developments with interest.

The savings from the scheme are quite modest, as the Minister will concede. The NFU calculates that ending the scheme will bring about a saving of about £8 million in 1995-96. That is a very small sum, taking into account the global sum of agricultural support. I am sure that it did not pass your attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that last night's threat of rebellion over the recent fishing deal produced an extra £28 million in grants because 27 Tory Members showed their dissent. On my calculation, that worked out to a little more than £1 million per dodgy vote.

This is not one of the best-attended debates; I am sure that it makes up for that in quality, if not in quantity. If the five Conservative Members present would care to show their rebellion tonight, there could be a useful £5 million to go back into the scheme. It would take only another £3 million and we would be able to make up the £8 million that the scheme is meant to save. Conservative Back-Bench Members might consider the way in which Government finance seems to work. There are certainly better odds than in the national lottery.

It is a sad fact that environmental grants for those and other environmental measures are still a very small part of the overall agricultural budget. Opposition Members have warmly supported schemes such as the environmentally sensitive areas scheme; it brings quick benefits to farmers and it benefits countryside management. However, there is still a need for the effective monitoring of those schemes. That is not an issue that we may talk about tonight, but I am sure that the Government accept that there is a need to evaluate whether public money is spent effectively and whether it achieves the objects for which it was designed.

The agri-environment programme is also very disappointing in terms of the overall proportion of money that is allocated to it. In fact, the agri-environment programme accounts for about 1 per cent. of current spending on agricultural support. The public would see

much more rationale behind grants directed towards environmental gain than they would in special beef premiums and other schemes linked to production subsidy. Support for environmental control—that is what the grant was designed for—would command popular support.

I cannot deny that profits in the dairy sector have improved recently and are fairly good at the moment, but farmers with existing quota are the ones who gain, while dairy farmers who want to buy or lease more quota to expand, because of agreements or developments that they may have—especially new entrants into the dairy industry who have to buy or lease quota—face heavy financial burdens. The grants were helpful in that respect. I hope that the Minister realises that some farmers will find it hard to raise the money to provide the facilities.

I do not want to take too much of the time of the House on narrow points connected with the regulations, but I should be grateful if the Minister would deal with two aspects in his reply. I understand that MAFF and the Department of the Environment are reviewing all environmental land management schemes. They want a more coherent approach to the implementation and development of schemes within the proper framework of a conservation strategy. We do not disagree with that. We certainly think that a land management and land use approach is sensible, and it is good to design schemes to meet the Government's international biodiversity commitments and the European Union habitat directive, which also places an obligation on them.

The Government's Environment Bill will be considered by the House shortly; that, too, has elements connected with the strategy, in that it deals with hedgerow conservation and conservation grants in general. What role does the Minister expect the forthcoming environmental protection agency to play in connection with conservation grants and with directing resources to conservation programmes in the agricultural sector, as part of an overall land use and countryside management scheme?

I note that the Minister said that some form of grant would be available for farmers in designated nitrate-vulnerable zones. Can he outline any details of how those schemes will work? Apparently, there is good reason for farmers in such zones to receive grants for waste storage. That is fair enough. We do not disagree with it; but if there is good reason for that, where is the reason for taking the grant away from other farmers? Preventing pollution is important not only in nitrate-vulnerable zones but in every region.

There is no doubt that when such incentives are lost, some farmers will be less able to invest in efficient and environmentally sensitive pollution control facilities, so there is still a potential agricultural pollution problem. The scheme has been successful, and I urge the Government to include something like it in any future overall land management scheme rather than to scrap it completely, as is proposed.

6.14 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Thank you for letting me catch your eye this evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to say a few words because the Minister's contribution was so brief. I had hoped to intervene in his speech, but having failed to do so I am now forced to make a speech of my own.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the success of the scheme. There is no doubt that for a comparatively small sum—about £150 million—it has radically reduced the number of pollution incidents, and that is a creditable success. As a result, the worst cases have already been grant-aided and pollution prevention facilities have been installed; but there are still farmers at the margins, whose profitability is not great, who have not yet managed to install facilities.

Some farmers in my constituency are not covered by the nitrate-vulnerable zone category but may be covered by others, such as environmentally sensitive areas or nitrate-vulnerable areas. I urge the Minister to consider whether farmers in areas presently zoned—they are already in a fairly special area, otherwise they would not be covered—could have their grants continued as if they were in nitrate-vulnerable zones. I ask him to think seriously about that idea, so that farmers on the margins, with low profitability, are covered. They are often using stock farming systems, with no other farming methods that they could use, so, for the sake of the environment, it would be worth while to include them.

6.15 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): In the last words of his speech, the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) emphasised the importance of the schemes. They exist not to support farm incomes or to help farmers to be more productive but to help the environment. It has been something of a misnomer that, in the past, they have been treated as farm schemes. It is right that they are administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and by the equivalent bodies for Wales and Scotland, but we should really regard them as part of the armoury for protecting the environment, not as part of the farm grant system—I see the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury nodding.

The irony is that cuts are being made precisely at the time when we are told on every other front that farming policy should be turned towards a wider rural policy, with more effective support for conservation and environmental protection. We are asked to take a step backwards when everyone else is saying that we should take a step forwards.

While congratulating the Minister on the success of the scheme, I must tell him that this is the last moment when he should accept Treasury cuts. We all know why cuts are being made. The reason has nothing to do with a change of attitude within MAFF—or, if it is, MAFF must be deaf and blind. It has to do with the fact that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has mighty little that he can get his hands on in MAFF's budget; the huge sums that pass through the Ministry are largely determined by our participation in the European Union common agricultural policy, so they are saved from the Chancellor's axe and left almost intact. The millions of pounds currently going into the area aid and the set-aside schemes remain beyond the scope of the House, of the Ministry and even of the Chancellor, yet what is, by comparison, the tiny sum available for the conservation grant scheme is up for grabs; in the usual polite terms that the Minister uses to describe such events, he says that the scheme will have "expired" by this time next year.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

We must ensure that, even if the Minister pursues that policy now, he must also introduce alternatives to take the place of the scheme. As other hon. Members have said, its main purpose was to ensure that the handling, storage and treatment of farm waste were effectively tackled. That does nothing for the productivity of the dairy farmer or the beef farmer; indeed, having installed facilities, farmers may find that the running costs make their holdings less productive. The scheme is designed to protect the wider community and the environment. It is not a farm support scheme.

The money made available for those who claim for the maintenance of hedgerows and stone walls can have the same effect. Once a farmer has taken up the scheme, he will have to maintain his hedgerows and walls again and again. Without financial support, that will be a continuing drain on his productivity. In my travels around the country in the past few years, I have seen dry stone walls in the Pennines that stop suddenly because at a certain point the grant support was reduced. That does not help the farmer; even worse, it is of real damage to the managed landscape which so many people want to protect, conserve and enhance.

I ask the Minister to explain what will be in place for farmers who do not happen to fall within the ESAs—I ask not for their sake but for the sake of future generations and the landscape. What will be in place to ensure that the useful initiatives taken under the hedgerow incentive scheme are extended to all field boundaries, including Cornish banks? Owing to an absurdity of bureaucratic bungling, Cornish banks—they do not happen to have massive growth on top, but they are otherwise identical to hedges in other parts of the country; they just happen to be our local variation—have been excluded from the hedgerow incentive scheme.

It is true that two thirds of pollution incidents have originated from beef or dairy farms. If, in future, they do not happen to be sited in nitrate-vulnerable zones, they will not be eligible for any sort of assistance. Who suffers from that? It is not so much the farmers, although they may be put to considerable expenditure, as the wider community and the environment.

Of course, those who had ready money in the years between 1989 and 1993, when they could obtain 50 per cent. grants toward expenditure on waste water schemes, were, on the whole, the more profitable farmers. Similarly, those who were able to take advantage of the scheme when support was reduced to 25 per cent. were still people with ready money. The people who are now left—the National Rivers Authority is desperately worried about them—are those with no financial resources with which to support this sort of expensive project. Some hon. Members may not be aware that the sums involved run into thousands of pounds, often on the holdings least able to stand that sort of expenditure—even less so without financial support of any kind.

The estimated savings amount to £8 million a year. I believe that the tax-paying public would cheerfully contribute £8 million to that purpose if they knew that the money was coming from the area assistance programme or from set-aside. Tonight, we should be weighing up the costs to the environment, not the costs to the farming community. That is why the Minister must take seriously the various questions put to us, and no doubt to him, by organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Council for the Protection of Rural England—not because they support the farming industry but because they are concerned about the impact on the environment.

I hope, too, that the Minister will give us—we cannot obtain it direct—the advantage of the advice that he has received from the NRA. All my contact with the authority, at the sharp end and on the farm, persuades me that it is desperately worried about the impact of these cuts.

It is surely symbolic of the attitude of the Government and of this Ministry that these cuts are made now. Support for agriculture is taking a wrong turning. It is "Alice in Wonderland" thinking to encourage set-aside at the same time as discouraging both the prevention of pollution and the enhancement of traditional features such as field boundaries.

It is also damaging and dangerous to suppose that, in future, policies such as these should be applied only to designated areas. As the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury said, there will always be marginal cases. If only areas designated as special, or as ESAs, or as nitrate-vulnerable zones, are the ones that get the support, there will always be a large number of hard cases that fall outside such categories. The public at large will feel, moreover, that pollution can have just as bad an effect on, say, the aquatic life cycle in other areas.

In the south-west, dairy farmers have had a great deal of trouble in recent months due to extensive flooding—flash floods, storms and rain. The rain of the past 24 hours has greatly increased the risks associated with overflows of slurry. There have been damaging incidents for which no particular blame should attach to the farmers concerned, but they clearly need the attention of the NRA.

If we are to have effective conservation and landscape management, and if we are also to ensure the sort of pollution prevention measures required of us by the EU, we cannot proceed on a designated area basis. There has to be a national policy. We cannot meet the requirements of the European directives, or of our home audience, if these grants are applied only to specific geographical areas. That is over-restrictive and could be extremely damaging.

I believe that this is a very sad step. Had the Minister been frank with the House, he would have admitted that he did not want to take it, but that he had the Treasury just down the road looking over his shoulder. He can redeem himself this evening, however, if he tells us what he hopes will be in place by this time next year, when the last residues of this valuable scheme are swept away by these measures. I hope that the Minister will be forward looking and will make positive suggestions to put in place national policies. It will not be sufficient to say that only limited, designated areas will require this sort of attention in future.

6.25 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I had not intended to speak in the debate until I received, earlier today, a book written by Gordon Conway, former professor of environmental technology at Imperial College of Science and Technology in London, and by Jules M. Pretty, director of the sustainable agricultural programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development, also in London. The book, entitled

"Unwelcome Harvest: Agriculture and Pollution", contains an interesting section dealing with this issue and describing the scale of the problem that we face. I believe that the House should bear the size of the problem in mind when deciding to cut £8 million of public money from this area of expenditure.

In the section entitled "Livestock Waste and Slurry" on page 276—I am sure researchers will want to look it up—we read:

"Specialised livestock operations are a very potent source of pollution. The worst problems arise from the slurry systems of pig and dairy farms in the UK . . . The livestock are housed in such a way that their faeces and urine fall through slatted floors into channels or pits from where they are periodically transferred into storage tanks or lagoons. The resulting nutrient load can be enormous: on the largest feedlots, with 900 to 2,000 animals per hectare, assuming an average animal size of 450 kg, each excreting 0.17 kilos of nitrate a day, the loading to each hectare is between 150 and 250 kgN per day.

The total national pollution load from livestock excretion is thus very large. In the United Kingdom it is equivalent to 150 million people, about two and a half times the human population, while in the USA it is 10 times greater, that is, equivalent to 2 billion people, or 40 per cent. of the world's population. As the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution put it, 'a modern farm of 40 hectares carrying a dairy herd of 50 cows and a pig population based on 50 sows has a potential pollution load equivalent to that of a village of 1,000 inhabitants.'"

I interpret all this to mean that we are dealing with a vast problem—a huge amount of slurry. The public will want legislation in place to ensure that it is all properly disposed of and that, if farmers are not prepared to invest in the equipment needed to comply with the legislation, a regime is put in place to help them, not just in sensitive areas, but in others too. Only thus can we avoid polluting and damaging our environment. That is my case this evening. I am not altogether convinced that Ministers have fully taken into account the huge scale of the problem with which the farming community is required to deal.

I understand that all my hon. Friends have received a fax this afternoon from the National Farmers Union. Its case is that this is an unreasonable economy on the part of the Government and it rejects it.

6.29 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I represent a constituency which, like that of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), is a high rainfall area. The impact of any heavy periods of rain in a high rainfall area exacerbates the problems that farmers have in controlling the slurry that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has so eloquently described in all its enormity. I should hate to say that it was a load of crap, but basically that is what we are talking about—a large load of crap.

One of the disappointing features of this matter, which is certainly reflected in the communications that we have received from the National Farmers Union, is that the scheme that the Government are trying to dismantle almost lock, stock and barrel has been so successful. Perhaps if the Minister replies to the debate, which I hope that he will, he will touch on the fact that the scheme is basically self-regulating. As farmers make the investment and the work is completed, there is no further call by them on any central grant system. As the improvements take place, the grant required slowly but surely reduces except perhaps in areas where we have new entrants into the dairy industry. Sadly, new entrants are few and far between, but they may wish to take up the opportunity to make the improvements, particularly as it is difficult to make capital investment when one is starting out and as there is great instability in the dairy industry at present.

Another issue could perhaps increase the loads to which my hon. Friend the Member for Workington referred in Britain. There is a possibility—I put it no stronger than that—that with the public outcry against the export of veal calves we may see a change in legislation that would bring about an increase in the British veal industry. I hope that we do, but that would only add to the problem that the British agricultural industry currently faces.

As other hon. Members have said, the grants are basically for environmental purposes. They do not directly assist the farming industry or improve its profitability. My area is not only a great dairy livestock area but an important tourist area. We are seeing the development of more eco-tourism and activity-based holidays, including both coarse and fly fishing. The cleanliness of our rivers is vital. We know what impact a spillage of nutrient-rich slurry can have on a waterway. It devastates it.

What advice, if any, has the Minister received from the National Rivers Authority on what impact the ending of the grants will have on the quality of our rivers and the level of fish in them? A slurry tank can spill over purely as a result of a sudden enormous downpour in a thunderstorm. It is literally an act of God. A whole river can be devastated. It takes a long time to restock a river with fish.

The Preseli area of my constituency is now an environmentally sensitive area. There is a possibility that farmers in such areas will continue to receive some form of grant aid. Designation as an ESA is an arbitrary way of deciding which areas should receive assistance. The rainfall on one side of the border of the ESA is exactly the same as on the other side. Whether the cows winter for four or five months indoors or not, they produce the same volume of slurry in Preseli as in South Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion or wherever.

Ceredigion and South Pembrokeshire are not designated as environmentally sensitive, yet they have exactly the same problems. It is arbitrary to use designation as a nitrate-vulnerable zone or environmentally sensitive area as the means of determining which areas qualify for grant aid.

As you will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the British public want their environment and particularly rivers and the sea to be as clean as possible. A great deal of pressure has been brought to bear on the authorities to upgrade the human sewage discharges into our environment. Yet here we have the Government in the face of this enormous problem—the figures have been quoted to us, and it is the equivalent of the sewage of millions of people—saying that they will in only a few odd areas assist the environment by providing grant aid and the relatively small amounts of money needed to ensure that we have no serious accidents.

Great pressure has been brought to bear on the water companies by the regulators and the European Union to improve sewage discharges. Sadly, it is not the whole nation that is contributing to the clean-up. The poor old water customers, particularly in the south-west of England, face massive bills to clean up sewage discharges. The Government's action seems to fly in the face of public opinion on other forms of environmental pollution. I urge the Minister to reconsider.

6.37 pm

Mr. Jack: This has been a useful debate. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their praise and support for what the scheme has achieved. Expenditure of some £150 million on encouraging 11,500 farmers to improve their waste disposal practices is a significant achievement. With respect to the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), in their graphic description of the rising tide, as they put it, of farm waste— *[Interruption.]*—even in the book which the hon. Member for Workington waves at me—there was perhaps a lack of appreciation of one of the fundamentals of good agricultural practice. All that waste is not bad. It is the way in which it is used that causes the problem.

Through the scheme we have encouraged farmers with good practice to control the use of that waste and prevent it from finding its way into the watercourses. All hon. Members rightly adverted to that as a problem. It is right that part of the advice on good agricultural practice, which will continue to be available free of charge from ADAS, notes that it is possible to make proper agricultural use of waste.

Mr. Ainger *rose—*

Mr. Jack: Let me answer the questions that have been raised before more are put to me. The hon. Gentleman asked about the National Rivers Authority. The NRA would be the first to admit that we have made progress. It also knows that we have not abandoned ship over the problem. We are concentrating our efforts on nitrate-vulnerable zones. We will continue to allow £2 million for research and development, and to deal with farm waste handling systems and acknowledge our responsibilities in that area.

Mr. Ainger: The Minister did not appreciate my argument and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). We are not saying that the industry needs advice on how to use slurry. The grants were to enable it to be collected safely so that it did not pollute waterways. Farmers fully appreciate the advantages of slurry— less need for artificial fertilisers, for example— and want to collect it safely, which is why they need the grant. They do not need advice on how to use it.

Mr. Jack: With respect, I pointed out that we spent three times as much as we set out to do—£150 million of public money—to encourage farmers to pursue what should be their responsibility, as good husbanders of the land, not to pollute. All hon. Members will understand the principle that the polluter pays. We have been paying to help potential polluters not to pollute.

The hon. Member for Workington should remember that, on the other side of the equation, fines of up to £20,000 can be imposed if people do not fulfil their responsibility not to pollute.

Mr. Tyler *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I will give way, but this will be the last time.

Mr. Tyler: The Minister referred briefly to advice from the National Rivers Authority and I hope that he will expand on it. I understand that it believes that only a comparatively small proportion of the work that needs to be done on farms—on dairy holdings in particular, but also on beef holdings—has been done. It does not believe that the danger will be restricted to nitrate-vulnerable zones, but that it is much more widespread. The less well-equipped and financed farms will find it difficult. What advice has he received from the NRA on those three matters?

Mr. Jack: I hope that I will not be guilty of misleading the House, but I have not received any advice from the NRA. It might have sent us some thoughts, but I do not know without examining the correspondence files in detail, and I hope that hon. Members will accept that as an honest statement from the Dispatch Box.

The National Rivers Authority may continue to underscore the importance of preventing pollution, which it polices. We genuinely think that we have played our part, in the way that I described, in achieving better control of pollution. We have not walked away from our responsibilities—the advice, good practice and research and development are all still there. We understand the problem.

Mr. Ainger *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I must press on. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) informed me that he could not be in his place for my closing speech. I understand that he is meeting some farmers. He emphasised the importance of the role of small farmers in these matters. The measures were designed for the small farmer and that support remains for plans that have already been approved. Many small farmers will have benefited from part of the £150 million that we spent and many in the nitrate-vulnerable zones will continue to be able to benefit.

As I said in my opening speech, part of the package of measures that my right hon. Friend the Minister said would form part of the Ministry's future programme will offer support in those difficult rural areas. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) will understand, under objective 5b assistance, we are able to use resources to strengthen the rural economy and opportunities for new forms of economic activity in such areas—the hon. Member for Pembroke mentioned farm holidays. That is one way in which our resources can help the farmers whom my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury mentioned.

Farmers have had five years to take advantage of the scheme and have been aware of many of the important messages on pollution. The fact that 11,500 have taken advantage of it is a clear sign of its success.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) asked several questions and I hope that he will have noted from my remarks that ADAS will remain in place and will continue to offer advice. I also told him about some of the plus points, such as the way in which we managed to redistribute our resources. I do not want this debate to be quite as rumbustious as that of last night, but the hon. Gentleman did not commit his party to restoring the money, or tell us whether it would consider any scheme if, God forbid, it were ever to form a Government. He criticised us for examining our priorities and deciding that, if we had achieved our objectives, the time was right to move on to other schemes—I demonstrated that we had done so when I mentioned the reduction in pollution incidents. He would live in a world

where all schemes stayed in place for ever and a day, and we would never have the resources to find new opportunities to assist the farming industry.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Jack: I will give way as the hon. Gentleman is such a nice chap.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I ask a simple question? If during the next few years after the scheme has ended, it is reported to Ministers that farmers are not complying and are expressing their difficulties to the enforcement authorities—perhaps telling them that they cannot afford to install the equipment—and that there has been a decline in standards, will they review the position?

Mr. Jack: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not expect me to trap myself or my right hon. Friends with a commitment on future expenditure.

Mr. Ainger: The hon. Gentleman asked my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) to do so.

Mr. Jack: Hear me out. We are committed— *[Interruption.]* I want to tell the House what we are committed to spending our money on. We are committed to providing information to farmers and we will continue to monitor the number of pollution incidents—the Conservatives are sensible and flexible on such matters—and will obviously keep them under review.

On wider developments in the environment, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe asked me how it would all fit together. The new environment agency will combine the NRA and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall said, the NRA has a keen interest in and will continue to take responsibility for pollution as part of the new agency. The inspectorate has a role, but it will be concentrated on large industry and not on agriculture. It will be up to us to monitor and listen to what the NRA and others have to say.

Clearly, the grants programme was a response to a high level of pollution and we have shown that, when there is a problem, we are prepared to act.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe asked several more questions. Help with farm waste systems will still be available. When the nitrate-vulnerable zones are defined, we will have a clear idea of the type of help and scheme that will be required. He will be aware that the consultation process and the consideration of representations is continuing. We are listening and talking carefully to farmers. They will have another opportunity to comment on the revised areas. Once we have all that information, we will know what type of scheme will be necessary. Resources will be provided to assist farmers facing difficulties in those areas.

I thank all hon. Members who contributed to the debate. I shall reflect carefully on what they said and I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) (No. 2) Scheme 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3002), dated 25th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 29th November, be approved.

Trunk Roads (Airedale and Wharfedale)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

6.49 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am delighted to have this opportunity to raise a number of important issues relating to trunk road schemes in Airedale and Wharfedale.

The saga of trunk road proposals in those two valleys is long; indeed, some may think of it as interminable. A plan to bypass Ilkley on the River Wharfe was drawn up as long ago as the 1930s, while the original public inquiry on the Airedale route in 1975 and 1976 was a landmark in that the inspector ultimately abandoned it following nine days of disruption, initiated by the famous or notorious—depending on one's viewpoint—Mr. John Tyme and others, resulting in changes to the rules governing such public inquiries.

Nothing that I intend to say tonight is intended to cast aspersions on my hon. Friend the Minister. He is carrying the baton passed to him by others. However, I cannot help thinking that part of the problem has been the fact that so many Ministers have had responsibility for roads since the mid-1980s. As they have come and gone, continuity has been lacking. There has certainly never been an opportunity for the public to participate in a proper public debate about all the possible solutions, especially to the problems relating to Saltaire and Shipley, to which reference will be made later.

It is significant that two of the most important decisions affecting the area were taken in the early 1980s on their own initiative by Ministers who both held office for a considerable period and thus had had time to become fully familiar with the position.

My right hon. and learned friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) came as the then Roads Minister to the town of Ilkley and decided to remove from the programme the riverside bypass route, which had been in place for some 40 years. He was followed at a later date by my noble Friend, now the Baroness Chalker, who walked up the narrow main street in Addingham village, saw the heavy lorries forcing pedestrians aside, and decided there and then that the Addingham bypass on the A65, long delayed by the former Labour Administration, must be restored to the programme as soon as possible.

Ministers can have that impact on the roads programme in particular areas. I wish my hon. Friend the present Minister for Railways and Roads a long and distinguished career in his present role.

I share an interest in both the A629-A650 Airedale route and the A65 through Wharfedale with my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox), who has carried this burden for even longer than I have, and he hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during this debate.

First, may I deal with the problem of the A650 route, parts 1 and 2 of which have now been completed, but which stops abruptly at Crossflatts, almost on the boundary between the Keighley and Shipley constituencies. Because the missing section represents an essential link with the major West Riding cities and the motorway network to the south of Bradford, my

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constituents and companies in my constituency have suffered the unacceptable delays and economic disadvantage represented by the bottleneck in Bingley.

The case for building the Bingley bypass as soon as possible can be simply stated. The road is justified on economic, environmental and road safety grounds. A further key factor in this case, however, is that the advance engineering work, costing up to £12 million, has already been completed. It involved the diversion of the Leeds and Liverpool canal, new bridges and engineering work on the adjoining railway line. In effect, we now have a linear building site through the town of Bingley, with no work taking place on it.

I shall outline in detail the economic case for the road from Keighley's viewpoint in a moment. In environmental terms, too, the argument is strong. The quality of people's lives would certainly improve if many vehicles, including a steady stream of heavy lorries, were removed from the town centre.

Exhaust emissions increase dramatically when vehicles are stationary or just crawl along, which happens in Bingley every day. The many blighted shops that have stood with their fronts boarded up for months, illustrated graphically by the Bingley Civic Society, might reopen if the bypass were built. In road safety terms, too, there must be obvious advantages in keeping through traffic and pedestrians apart, and there would also be scope for traffic management measures.

It would be easy to spend the rest of my time and that of the Minister reading out letters from individuals, companies and organisations in my constituency pleading for the completion of the Bingley bypass. I shall not do so, partly because my hon. Friend's Department received copies of most of them in the latter part of last year—regrettably, it failed to heed them—but also because I want to leave my hon. Friend sufficient time to respond, even given that this Adjournment debate is taking place at an hour which, in the past, would have been regarded as exceptionally early.

To set those letters in context, I should say that Keighley's unemployment problem is severe in the inner part of the town and on some of its estates. It may not be apparent from the bald figures, which take into account the hinterland of the travel-to-work area. Unlike Bradford, Keighley has not benefited from regional assistance, from city challenge or so far from the unitary regeneration budget.

On 1 July 1988—nearly seven years ago—I initiated a debate on local trunk road construction and referred to a survey of local companies that I had conducted, showing that more than 90 per cent. of companies responding had stated that completion of that road was vital to their future development; that figure would be just as high today.

Last week, Peter Black, a public company based in Keighley for many years, announced the unavoidable but no less shocking news of 285 local redundancies, which the company has done its best to avoid. The absence of a good road link may not have been the decisive factor but it certainly did not help. Peter Black is now developing its distribution business, and the managing director of that subsidiary, Mr. H. E. Johnson, writes:

"In 1994 we appointed the consulting arm of KPMG Peat Marwick to carry out an exercise to review the feasibility of expanding our distribution business. One of the major conclusions was that there is a cost disadvantage of approximately £200,000 per annum as a result of being based in Keighley. Currently it takes an hour to cover the journey between the motorway network and our distribution centre and as we make a significant number of journeys per annum this amounts to a substantial excess cost. In this increasingly competitive world this cost cannot be ignored.

We have found the labour market in Keighley to be very flexible and competitive. This is certain to be attractive to any company considering establishing a new base or expanding an existing business. However, the lack of an effective road network will almost certainly discourage them. We frequently receive comments from our customers as to the inaccessibility of our site and as a consequence they visit far less frequently than they would otherwise like. It takes as long to drive the 18 miles from the M62 to Keighley as it does to cover the 75 miles from Nottingham to the M62.

An additional problem is that of recruitment. Occasionally we are unable to fill a vacancy with a local person and in this circumstance we have experienced difficulty in recruiting key members of our team because of the extended travelling time to and from Keighley".

I emphasise the estimated annual cost of £200,000 per annum to just one firm. How can we attract new companies to Keighley and help existing ones expand when they carry such a burden? Where do we find new jobs for the 285 people soon to be out of work?

The president of the Bradford chamber of commerce, Mr. Andrew Wade, writes:

"The Bingley By-pass is desperately needed—the character of the town centre which is divided by the main A650 is rapidly being ruined as the uncertainty continues and shoppers go elsewhere . . . journey times between Keighley and Bradford, the two main centres within the metropolitan district, are impossible to predict, with the result that delivery times and meeting times can only be achieved with certainty by allotting additional travelling time or using rat runs".

Charles Forgan, the chief executive of Bradford Breakthrough—the organisation that brings together the public and private sectors throughout the district—writes of

"the dismay and incomprehension which will be felt"

about the continuing delay

"not only by the business community in Bradford, Bingley and Keighley but also by residential and commercial groups who have been united in their determination that the Bingley relief road should be built".

Mr. Geoffrey Lister, chief executive of the Bradford and Bingley building society, states that construction is

"a matter of extreme urgency."

The society, he writes, may have to "consider other options" for the centralisation of its computer operations, especially if there is a further significant delay.

Professor David Johns, vice-chancellor of Bradford university, states:

"the lack of progress means that more damage is done to the environment the longer the traffic jams remain".

He believes that delay is causing widespread economic harm.

Mr. Norman Finnigan, personnel and operations director of Grattan plc, the largest private employer in Bradford; Mr. J. P. Taylor, company secretary of Allied Colloids plc, with 2,000 local staff; and the Very Reverend John Richardson, Provost of Bradford cathedral, are united in complaining that it is ridiculous to spend £12 million on advance works and then to gain no benefit from the investment because the job is left half-done.

The local newspapers, the *Keighley News* and the *Telegraph and Argus*, have pleaded for action, for the sake of all sections of the community. Mr. Geoff Smith and Mr. Iain Copping, chairman and director of the

Keighley Business Forum, have added their voices to the clamour. All the parties on Bradford council are united in their support for the bypass. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), who cannot be present tonight, is a resident of Bingley, and he has asked me to tell the Minister that he too supports the call for the bypass.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to refer finally to someone who has good cause to look to the future—16-year-old John Robinson, who showed me the letter he wrote to the Prime Minister just a few days ago, in which he said:

"I know from watching the news that the Department of Transport is cutting back its road building plans for the future. I feel that the new road is a desperate need not just because of traffic congestion but also to secure jobs at major companies, which may have to move because of a poor transport link out of Keighley through Bradford, to the rest of the country."

During the 1988 debate, to which I have already referred, I described the situation as intolerable. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), responded by saying:

"We intend to press on. Our aim is to provide a new continuous high standard route to link Bradford and Skipton . . . The only option that we must reject is doing nothing. The area deserves better than that."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1988; Vol. 136, c. 709-10.]

Well, things may have happened since 1988, but still no road exists. The area indeed deserves better than that. Furthermore, it is totally inexplicable that, when the Department categorised road schemes last year, the Bingley bypass, which must be considered by anybody with anything about him to be extremely urgent after all those years, was only placed in the second group of less urgent schemes. It is no good anybody saying that some priority 2 roads may be built before some priority 1 schemes, because that grading sends out a clear signal—one which I utterly reject.

I would like to see the comparative COBA—cost-benefit analysis—work carried out by the Department and the Highways Agency, because I will take some convincing that, on economic, environmental and road safety grounds, the route is not extremely urgent—even if the half-completed advance works are discounted. If one takes them into account, it is frankly scandalous and farcical not to press ahead as quickly as possible.

If the Department has left undone for more than 20 years what it should have done for the Bingley bypass, many residents of the Wharfe valley feel that it has done what it should not have done on the A65. Bypasses have been provided on that road for, among other places, Settle, Skipton, Draughton, Addingham, and Burley-in-Wharfedale. There are now proposals to construct further schemes soon at Chelker and Manor Park.

I am sure that all those places deserve and need bypasses, but it is hardly surprising that many people in Ilkley, for which much preparatory work on a bypass has also been done, suspect that there is a plan to divert traffic on to the A65. There is even talk of a motorway through Wharfedale, although that term is more than slightly misleading, since much of the road is single-carriageway standard only.

Assuming, as I do, that there is no such conspiracy, nevertheless the Department and the Highways Agency should accept that major improvement schemes to upgrade parts of the A65 are bound to have a cumulative effect in attracting traffic to the route. Following the recent work of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, that principle is now generally accepted.

That effect is bound to be intensified if, even before the completion of the Burley-in-Wharfedale bypass, which has certainly been much needed, an announcement is made that the Manor Park bends scheme is to start in the next financial year. The Minister should appreciate that the Manor Park bends scheme has been in gestation for a fraction of the time of the Bingley bypass, and that its benefits are essentially based on road safety factors alone.

Furthermore, by further improving the A65 ahead of the A650, some traffic will be diverted from the latter to the former, bearing in mind the congestion in Bingley, thus further adding to the conviction of many that the Department of Transport wishes to see an increase in traffic on the A65 to justify the construction of a bypass around Ilkley, which is, as everybody knows, a highly contentious proposal.

The road safety arguments in favour of eliminating the Manor Park bends on the A65 are formidable—all the more so following two tragic fatal accidents in recent weeks. I do not agree, however, that there is a case for building a massive four-lane highway alongside the existing road while retaining the latter in situ for local traffic.

That proposal needs to be seen in conjunction with Bradford council's unitary development plan, in so far as it affects the Ilkley area. That plan has led many to fear that the essential character of a beautiful valley might easily be lost.

I believe that it is also quite unnecessary to construct a large roundabout at Ben Rhydding, at the western end of the new stretch of road, taking an acre of land away from the Ben Rhydding sports club's car park. The club quite naturally looks ahead to the next stage, which would be an Ilkley bypass. That would remove a great deal more land from the playing fields which are used by hundreds of people every weekend.

It should be borne in mind that we are talking about a steep-sided valley, and I am not aware of any alternative accessible land of similar scale to which the club might have access. At the very least, the club is entitled to be kept much more fully informed than it has been when its very existence is at stake.

As I have already suggested, a question mark hangs over the Ilkley bypass, which is now classed as a category 4 scheme. I welcome the opportunity for further consideration in the light of developing trends. I know that many organisations and individuals want to contribute to the continuing debate. The downside to that debate is the uncertainty which it has created, but I believe that most people will accept that that uncertainty cannot be avoided as we continue to consider the important issues that must be addressed before a decision is reached.

I welcome the existence of organisations such as the Wharfe Valley Road Forum, which is led exceedingly well by Dr. Jim Burton. It regularly brings together a wide range of interested organisations from the area and beyond to discuss road issues.

In the coming months, I hope that the Minister will find time in his schedule to visit Airedale and Wharfedale. It is easy to look at proposals and plans on paper, but it is

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a different matter to visit an area. It is essential to visit Airedale and Wharfedale to appreciate the problems properly. problems.

I recall that, when the previous Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), visited, he was surprised and delighted by the beauty of the lovely valleys. He started to appreciate the concerns that had been expressed by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley.

I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that we will provide him with a generous Yorkshire welcome. I am sure that he appreciates the great concerns that are felt, and I ask him to address them urgently.

7.8 pm

Sir Marcus Fox (Shipley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on securing the Adjournment debate. I am grateful to him for giving me two or three minutes to add to his remarks.

I am grateful to the Minister—at the present time, it is rare to say such a thing to the Minister for Railways and Roads—for the Burley bypass and the announcement to correct the Manor Park bends, which have been such an accident blackspot. However, I must not lull him into a sense of false security, because section 3 of the Aire valley is not simply a trunk road—it is a bypass round the town of Bingley.

I must declare an interest, as I reside in Bingley. My constituents, who number just short of 70,000, all understand that what was a thriving community has become a shadow of its former self. The town centre no longer deserves to be named as such. Congestion and pollution have forced the public to shop elsewhere. As my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley said, the town is now occupied by traffic that trundles through ceaselessly, especially heavy lorries. It is no exaggeration to say that the quality of life for thousands of my constituents is deteriorating fast.

People are inclined to forget that there is such a thing as northbound traffic, which is vital commercially. It is a vital route. Ours is an area built on trade and commerce—engineering and textiles are just two of the older industries. However, the A650 and the A65 are the main trunk roads from West Yorkshire to the west and east of Scotland, Cumbria and north Lancashire.

The tragedy is that, in the 25 years that I have been the Member of Parliament for Shipley, I have somehow failed to ensure that that road is completed. It is now perilously close to Bradford, and I use that word deliberately because—there are other plans further ahead than Bradford—no one can understand why that route, which was previously thought to be important when the money was available, somehow now does not warrant the same priority.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister fully understands the situation. I regret that the Government have had to make economies, but I plead with him at the earliest opportunity to recognise the importance of the matter to so many of my constituents and friends.

7.11 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): The development of the Department's schemes in the Airedale and Wharfedale valleys has a long history, which my hon. Friends know extremely well, and which I need not rehearse to the House again tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) suggested that the rapid comings and goings of Ministers with my current responsibilities in the Department have led to a lack of continuity in considering the importance of those schemes. However, I can assure his constituents that any lack of continuity among Ministers is more than compensated for by his continuing persistence in arguing the case on behalf of his constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) has also shown persistence—he reminded us that he has battled in support of those schemes for 25 years.

In Airedale, the Department has seven schemes. Of those, two are completed and five are still in preparation. The aim of those schemes is to provide a good route between the Airedale business centres and the motorway network, to secure a raft of economic and environmental benefits for communities in the area and contribute significantly to economic regeneration by improved transport links. It will connect the M62 motorway via the city of Bradford metropolitan council schemes, which have already been built or are being planned, and the A650 trunk road bypass of Drighlington, opened by the Department in 1991.

Airedale has seen considerable investment in recent years, both in the schemes that have been completed and in the construction of advanced works for schemes yet to be built. The two completed schemes are the A650 between Kildwick and Beechcliffe, which was opened to traffic in August 1988 at a construction cost of £20 million, and the Victoria Park to Crossflatts section, which was opened to traffic in October 1988 at a construction cost of £16 million.

Good progress is being made on the five schemes in preparation, and those include the Bingley relief road scheme, which both my hon. Friends mentioned. That is a three-mile dual carriageway bypass of Bingley town centre. It will relieve heavy congestion in the town centre, by removing about 80 per cent. of the traffic. It will bring significant environmental and safety improvements to Bingley.

Good progress is being made on that scheme, and several advance works have been completed. My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley referred to those. One major advance works contract is currently under way—the construction of retaining walls at Crossflatts railway station, prior to electrification of the Leeds to Skipton railway line. Work on that commenced in July of last year and should be completed by the spring of 1995. As my hon. Friends know, all the statutory orders for the Bingley relief road have now been completed.

Both my hon. Friends reminded the House that the Bingley relief road scheme was categorised as priority 2 in the review undertaken of the roads programme in March 1994 and, although it is true that, in general, priority 2 schemes are likely to have longer lead times, some priority 2 schemes—which could include the Bingley relief road—may be built before all the priority 1 schemes have been completed, primarily because their statutory process is already further advanced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley has argued that there are strong economic and environmental reasons for making progress with that scheme. I accept that there

could be some absurdity if advance works were completed too long before the roads that they are designed to serve. That factor has some influence on my thinking.

There is also a misconception—indeed, a fear—that the construction of the Bingley relief road may be delayed as a result of the expensive tunnel option for the contiguous Saltaire relief road scheme. I can give my hon. Friends a categorical assurance that such fears are unfounded.

The Saltaire scheme is at a very much earlier stage of development, while, as I have said, the Bingley scheme is very near the end of the preparatory stage, and could be ready to start construction. The Saltaire scheme will not influence or delay the provision of funds for the Bingley relief road scheme, because, although both those schemes are part of the longer-term strategy that we have developed for the road needs of the area, the schemes can stand alone in terms of development and of finance, and are not in any way interdependent.

The other schemes in preparation in Airedale include the A650 Shipley eastern bypass, which is planned to provide a link with the local highway authority schemes in Bradford to the South and to the M62 motorway. A preferred route for that scheme, a 1.3 mile dual carriageway, was announced in March 1992. That is a priority 1 scheme, and we are pressing ahead with the design as quickly as possible. It is intended that it should be constructed before the Saltaire relief road is built.

However, the development of the Shipley eastern bypass depends on sufficient work on the Saltaire relief road options being completed to determine the way that the two schemes should eventually be linked. The next stage for the Shipley eastern bypass will be the publication of draft orders.

The A650 Hard Ings road improvement is a short length of single carriageway road, joining the already constructed sections of the Airedale route, which lie to either side of it. The existing road is to be improved to dual carriageway standard. The improvement will be achieved by widening the existing road on its northern side. Widening the road to the north avoids residential properties and the sensitive area of Victoria Park, which is one of the few areas of open space in Keighley.

Mr. Waller: I appreciate the comments that my hon. Friend has made about the Hard Ings road scheme, but could I ask him to take special care as regards the two important employers on the north side of that road? I believe that both deserve to be kept fully informed about the intentions of the Highways Agency and the Department, because both are expanding companies that provide the jobs that we need in Keighley, and the uncertainty that clouds their future is worrying.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend made that argument at the meeting that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley had with me last week. Those points were noted, and we will act upon them.

Following public consultation, the preferred route for that scheme was announced in March 1992. The draft Side Roads Order was published in October last year. However, it may be necessary to hold a public inquiry to deal with the objections that have been received, of which there have been 67 to date.

The final scheme in the raft is the A629 Skipton to Kildwick improvement, which went to public inquiry in October 1993. The inspector's report has been received, and is currently being considered.

On 19 December 1994, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced the new starts for 1995-96. Those included the A65 Manor Park improvement scheme, and the A65 Hellifield and Long Preston bypass in Wharfedale. Those schemes are much needed on environmental and safety grounds.

In Wharfedale, two projects have already been completed: the Addingham bypass and the Draughton bypass. The Addingham bypass was opened to traffic in October 1990. It is a two-mile-long single carriageway bypass to the south of the village. As a result of the bypass, traffic levels in the village have fallen from 14,000 per day to 4,800—a reduction of two thirds.

The majority of heavy goods vehicles have been removed, which has considerably improved road safety through the centre of the village. The personal injury accident rate has dropped from approximately eight per year to less than one. Noise, air pollution and congestion levels have also been significantly reduced.

The Draughton bypass was opened to traffic in December 1991. It is a 1.4-mile-long single carriageway bypass to the south of the village. The village itself is a conservation area surrounded by open countryside. The bypass takes 7,700 vehicles per day, of which about 14 per cent. are heavy goods vehicles, leaving only about 300 vehicles—predominantly local traffic—in the centre of the village.

Those schemes are prime examples of what the Government seek to achieve through the construction of rural bypass schemes which improve the quality of life and reduce accident rates in towns and villages by the removal of through traffic.

Other schemes in Wharfedale include the Chelker bends improvement, the Chelker to Addingham improvement, the Ilkley bypass, the Manor Park improvement, the Burley-in-Wharfedale bypass and the Otley to Burley improvement.

The Chelker bends improvement is located between the Draughton bypass and the Addingham to Chelker improvement. The existing road has poor alignment and a very sharp bend at the western end of Chelker reservoir. Good progress is being made with the scheme. In his announcement of 6 December 1994, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State identified it as a regional improvement scheme that will start in the coming financial year.

The Ilkley bypass is a four-mile dual carriageway. The preferred route was announced in December 1992 and was selected because it was considered to have the least impact on the environment and to take account of the many local comments received. However, as there were more pressing and urgent cases elsewhere, the scheme was placed in the longer-term category in the roads programme review and there will be no further work on the scheme until it can once again be considered for entry to the active programme.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley said, that gives plenty of time for further consideration to be given to the scheme. Meanwhile, the preferred route has been

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announced and safeguarded for planning purposes. That ensures relief for people whose property might be blighted as a result of the scheme. There is no further work on the scheme at present.

The Manor Park improvement aims to bring about a significant improvement to road safety, especially at the eastern end of the scheme where a series of bends have contributed to an accident rate which is more than twice the national average. It is contiguous to the Burley-in-Wharfedale bypass which is currently under construction and which my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley mentioned in a favourable light.

The new two-mile carriageway will run alongside the existing carriageway, which will be retained as a local access road. It will terminate in a roundabout at the western end, thus helping to control the speed of traffic entering Ilkely. The scheme was given the go-ahead in December 1992, following a public inquiry at which all draft orders were considered. As I explained earlier, the scheme was included in the list of new starts for the next financial year announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 19 December 1994.

The Burley-in-Wharfedale bypass, which is currently under construction, should be open to traffic before the end of March. I know that both my hon. Friends hope to be present on that happy occasion. I am not sure whether I shall be able to join them on that day, but I shall certainly take up the generous invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley to visit the Airedale and Wharfedale area, to enjoy the generous Yorkshire welcome of which he assured me and to see for myself the land where the road schemes will be provided. Like my hon. Friend, I find it far more instructive to look at the land relating to schemes than to try to understand them from reading maps.

I hope that my hon. Friends will conclude from my remarks that the Government are strongly committed to major road improvements in both Airedale and Wharfedale. That is demonstrated by the level of investment to date and the volume of preparation work which is currently being undertaken. I commend both my hon. Friends for their strong and vigorous advocacy of the economic and environmental needs of their constituents, both individuals and businesses. I look forward to meeting some of their constituents when I am able to accept their invitation to visit the region.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 20 January 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Clerk to read the Orders of the Day, I wish to place on record the fact that today is the anniversary of the first assembly of the House of Commons in 1265.

Home Energy Conservation Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It was a surprise when I came top of the ballot for private Members' Bills this year. It was only the second time that I had put my name in and I have never prayed so hard to lose a ballot as I did last year. I was even more surprised to come top because a short time before I had drawn the No. 1 question at Prime Minister's Question Time—it was when the national lottery had just got off the ground and everyone was asking me to buy their lottery tickets for them. It is no good hon. Members asking me to win money for them—my role in life seems to be to win work rather than money in lotteries.

After I heard the result of the draw, my first thought was the Energy Conservation Bill that my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) introduced last year. I supported it strongly and promised to do so again. When one comes first in the ballot, however, many people come knocking on one's door. Before I had to decide on the Bill, I received 40 or 50 suggestions from individuals and organisations. I considered some, but thought all along that, if there was a chance that I might get meaningful energy conservation legislation through, that would be my choice.

I did not think that the task was that hopeful—we all know what happened to the Energy Conservation Bill last year—and I knew that it would not be easy. Last year, 217 amendments and seven new clauses, some of which were sensible, were proposed, not in Committee but on the Floor of the House; it was quite an extraordinary affair. Given some of the opening comments about how uncontroversial the Bill was, it was even more extraordinary and, in the light of what happened, those comments seem ironic.

Despite what happened last year, support for such measures and the Bill has grown outside the House and the Government are beginning to realise the extent of that support. My choice was encouraged by my postbag. I received more letters from individuals in support of the Energy Conservation Bill than on all other issues put together. From speaking to my constituents about the issue for some months, I realised that there was strong feeling in favour of new measures to encourage energy conservation. I was also influenced by my experience of life as, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I had the opportunity to live in Stockholm, Sweden. The amount of energy that we used in our well-insulated flat there was far less than the amount required in the small house that I had left behind in England, despite the fact that we occasionally experienced temperatures of minus 27 deg C and regularly experienced those well below 0 deg.

I considered other Bills, such as environmental labelling, but after much consideration decided that it was to be the Home Energy Conservation Bill for me. Hon. Members who attended debates on last year's Bill will remember the impressive support that it gained both in the House and among local authorities and organisations of all types outside. Hon. Members will also know that the subject has been debated four times in the past year. I hope that they will forgive me if I repeat arguments, but I intend to concentrate on some of the changes made since last year's Bill and to describe how this Bill fits in with where this country is in the energy debates.

Support for the Bill is increasing. More than 700 elected councils throughout the country, of all political parties, now support it and, during the past fortnight, Bournemouth and Watford have added their support. It is vital that the Bill has the support of local authorities as they will be the main recipients of the new duties under its provisions.

Few other Bills have commanded such wide support among elected councils, but the Bill also has exceptional support among voluntary organisations. Hon. Members will not be surprised that it enjoys the enthusiastic support of environmental campaigners such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, in view of the importance of energy conservation to our environment. Given the Bill's benefits for the "fuel poor", the support of the National Right to Fuel Campaign and the Right to Warmth Campaign is predictable. But it must be almost unprecedented for a Bill to receive backing from organisations as varied as the Institute of Housing, Age Concern, Mencap, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Trades Union Congress as well as community health councils, residential associations, townswomen's guilds and many others.

The Bill has popular support from people across the country of all political persuasions and of none, which is why I am delighted that the Bill's sponsors come from so many different parts of the House. I am particularly grateful for the support of Conservative Members, including the hon. Members for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo), for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris), for Keighley (Mr. Waller), and for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), for his constructive approach so far to the Bill.

I have had terrific support from all hon. Members as I have walked about the House in recent weeks, which has been interesting for me as a new Member. It has come particularly from Opposition Members. I must also thank hon. Members in my own party who are here this morning.

Finally, I pay tribute to hon. Members who have taken up this type of Bill before. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) first introduced an Energy Conservation Bill and continues to be a strong supporter, for which we are grateful. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon -Tweed had the

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difficult task of attempting to take his Energy Conservation Bill through the House last year in the face of strong opposition and opposition tactics.

Essentially, the Bill that I propose this year gives local authorities a duty to survey the energy efficiency of residential properties in their areas and produce reports to enable the Secretary of State to act. That is necessary to correct the current lack of co-ordinated information on home energy efficiency across the country. It is widely felt, particularly by environmentalists and those who work in energy conservation, that that is the main obstacle to a comprehensive national energy conservation strategy. That is why the Association for the Conservation of Energy has called this the most important Bill for energy conservation since the war and why it supports it so strongly, for which I am grateful.

Clause 1 defines an energy conservation authority. We are in the same position as last year as that is not easy to define, given the on-going reorganisation. But it is agreed that the responsibility of being an energy conservation authority should fall on councils that are already responsible as housing authorities.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Will the hon. Lady clarify the philosophy of her Bill before she goes any further? She has criticised the constructive criticism last year about the Bill presented by the right hon. Member for Berwick-Upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), but in her Bill, has not she learnt lessons from those criticisms, particularly in giving much greater flexibility to energy conservation authorities in applying the Bill's terms?

Mrs. Maddock: The hon. Gentleman's observations are correct. As I go on, I intend to emphasise the changes that we have made.

Clause 1 seeks to define clearly some of the names used in the Bill, which created all sorts of problems last year, particularly the definition of "measures and arrangements". That was not in last year's Bill, but is included this time to emphasise the wide range of possible ways in which local authorities can deal with home energy conservation. However, it is not intended to be all-inclusive.

Clause 2 is the hub of the Bill. It sets out the duties of energy conservation authorities, which are to assess the energy efficiency of their own properties and take reasonable steps—I stress the word "reasonable"— to assess the potential for improvement in energy efficiency of other residential properties in their areas. Specifically, each authority has a duty to produce and publish a strategy report containing the measures that it believes are necessary to achieve energy savings of 30 per cent. from the homes in its area.

Last year's Bill also gave local authorities a duty to state the measures that they thought were necessary to reduce domestic energy use by 10 and 20 per cent. Those additional requirements have been dropped because the Government felt that they would make councils produce three different reports. There is no reason why local authorities cannot prioritise the measures that they recommend. The timetable set by the Secretary of State would almost certainly necessitate that by spreading the required measures over a number of years. It has been debated whether 20 or 30 per cent. should be the target. I chose to begin with 30 per cent. because it is a realistic aim for most councils.

In their climate change document, the Government conclude:

> "Perhaps up to 25 per cent. of current total energy consumption outside the transport sector could be saved through take up of energy efficiency investments with a payback of up to 5 years".

Many other countries have much more ambitious targets, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said that a 60 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions is needed globally in the near future. On that matter, in their White Paper, "This Common Inheritance: The Second Year Report", the Government acknowledge that

> "Using energy efficiently is the quickest and most cost-effective way of reducing CO_2 emissions."

It has been suggested that setting the same target for all local authorities is unfair, as some have already done a lot of energy conservation work. Surprisingly, the councils that have done the most seem to be the most enthusiastic about the Bill. If local authorities have a real problem making further progress, there is no reason why the Secretary of State cannot be flexible in setting his timetable.

In common with last year's Bill, the councils' reports must contain an assessment of how much carbon dioxide emissions would decrease if the measures were implemented, as well as a statement of the authority's policy for giving priority to the work to be carried out in accommodation occupied by those suffering financial hardship, whom we often describe as the "fuel poor". The report must also be fully costed.

Clause 3 provides that authorities that so wish may include an assessment of the savings in fuel bills that they would expect from their reports' implementation. Some hon. Members will remember that that was a duty rather than a power in last year's Bill. Authorities can also include their estimate of the effect of the measures on nitrogen and sulphur dioxide emissions and the number of jobs that would be created by the reports' implementation. In an ideal world, those would all be done as duties by local authorities. However, I recognise the limited financial resources that we are trying to work with, so to minimise the cost to local authorities, I have conceded on that point.

The detailed list of consultees contained in last year's Bill was considered unnecessary and over-bureaucratic. Although it is highly desirable that parish councils, tenants associations and environmental groups should be consulted about energy conservation reports, I know how much councils already consult one another and, in the interests of progress, I have been persuaded to avoid the danger of over-prescribing how councils produce their reports.

Clause 4 covers the role of the Secretary of State. In England, the responsible Department will be, of course, the Department of the Environment, whereas in Scotland and Wales the respective Secretaries of State will be responsible.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Has the hon. Lady heard from the Northern Ireland Office whether the

Housing Executive will voluntarily meet the standard set in the Bill? I believe that Northern Ireland is not covered by the terms of the Bill.

Mrs. Maddock: I have not heard directly from the Housing Executive, but I appreciate that many hon. Members will be disappointed that, unlike its predecessor, the Bill no longer applies to Northern Ireland. I share that disappointment, but in mitigation, clause 7 at least provides for the possible extension of the Bill to Northern Ireland should any future Government accept that proposal. I would support that.

The duty of the Secretary of State is first to set a date by which all the reports must be sent to him. He will then publish a timetable for progress on those reports.

Clause 6 deals with money and provides for the expenses incurred by local authorities and others in implementing measures according to the Secretary of State's timetable.

In an effort to respond constructively to the criticisms levelled at last year's Bill, substantial parts of it have been changed, but the essential elements remain. Last year's proposals were criticised because there were too many "shalls" and not enough "mays". I hope that we have addressed that problem through the changes that have been made.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Clause 6 makes it clear that no new money will be available. Can the hon. Lady tell us how she expects the Bill's proposals to be financed?

Mrs. Maddock: If the hon. Gentleman will be a little more patient, that should become clearer when I explain how costs will be incurred by local authorities.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I understand that Northern Ireland could be incorporated within the terms of the Bill—in common with last year's Energy Conservation Bill—at a later stage. I presume that that is due to pressure from the Government and their willingness to accept various provisions. It is interesting to note that although the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill does not apply to Northern Ireland, a Government statement will be made in Committee to the effect that it will be extended to it in order to gain support from hon. Members representing Northern Ireland who have tabled their own relevant Bill. At some stage today, perhaps the Minister will tell us that it is the Government's intention in Committee to extend the worthy Home Energy Conservation Bill to Northern Ireland, which should not be excluded by the proposed new arrangements.

Mrs. Maddock: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and I also hope that we shall hear that commitment from the Minister, if not today, then in Committee.

When discussing how we should deal with local authorities, one might ask why the Secretary of State should prescribe exactly what the local authorities should do. In this case, however, the Secretary of State will be using statistics produced by local authorities, so his direction is necessary.

When the Energy Conservation Bill was discussed last year, a number of hon. Members accused it of creating "thermal thought police" in every local authority, who would have the right of entry into every home to measure heat loss and the right to insist on the installation of double glazing, against the wishes of the owner. Although that image might have been amusing, it was not amusing that hon. Members genuinely considered that a likely result of the Bill. That was not the intention behind that proposed legislation and nor is it the intention in this year's Bill. To make that absolutely clear, we have included clarification in several clauses for the avoidance of doubt, but I shall not bore hon. Members with that now.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I understand that the changes are designed to make it transparent that the Bill does not confer powers on local authority officers to enforce the measures contained in it. A number of my colleagues on the Conservative Benches will be happier about those changes, because on far too many occasions when it has been left to local officers to interpret what their powers may or may not be, they have gone beyond what was intended even by the House.

Mrs. Maddock: I accept that we must be careful. I was told that the Bill should contain more "mays" than "shalls" because otherwise people just get on with things. I accept that there is a danger if we are not clear about what we want people to do. People can interpret legislation for their own ends, one way or another.

There is no reason to force anyone to have a energy audit carried out on his home because, as has been proved time and again, a local authority does not need to examine every home in order to produce a strategy report. After all, local authorities manage to produce house condition surveys annually without going into every home. Many authorities use sampling methods and general principles, so there is absolutely no reason why authorities should not be able to produce a comprehensive set of proposals to conserve energy in their local homes without the necessity of going into every house.

When the Energy Conservation Bill was proposed last year, a number of local authorities were understandably concerned about the effort that would be required to fulfil their obligations. For that reason two local authorities, Derby city council and Newark and Sherwood district council, were asked to assume that the Bill had become law and that the relevant council committee had asked officers for information on resource and staffing implications of drawing up local conservation plans required by the Bill in their areas. Neither council had any difficulty formulating those plans. They calculated that they could conduct a full energy audit based on a sample of 10 per cent. of homes and produce the required report for less than £50,000. That figure was the cost of implementing last year's proposed Bill, and it was assumed that councils had no existing records or database of the energy efficiency of any of their local homes. That is manifestly untrue.

A number of councils have conducted infra-red surveys of their areas and produced photographs of the hot spots where the heat has escaped. I know that that has been done successfully in Ealing and that a county council attempted to do the same some years ago. Sutton will do exactly that in three weeks' time and exhibit the results to the public, as Ealing did. People will be able to pick out their own home, get an idea of how much heat is escaping and receive advice on what they can do to conserve energy.

With the changes that have been made to create the Home Energy Conservation Bill this year, some councils will face virtually no cost when producing their reports

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because they already have the required information. As the requirements for a full energy audit have been replaced with a duty merely to assess the energy efficiency of authorities' properties and to take reasonable steps to estimate the potential for improving energy efficiency in other properties, it is unlikely that the Bill's implementation will cost most local authorities even half as much as the Government estimated last year.

The Bill is essential to enable us to have a comprehensive national energy conservation strategy. I accept that, from time to time, the Government have produced a variety of good initiatives with the result that several hundreds of thousands of properties and their owners have been helped. An example of such a scheme is the greenhouse programme, in which I was involved when I was a local councillor. However, last year there were discussions about that, and we were told that it was a demonstration programme and would not go on for ever. Much has been done under the home energy efficiency scheme.

However, the Bill is important because, although we need on-going plans, we need, above all, to co-ordinate our targets, commitments and resources. The Bill and its predecessor, which we discussed last year, were criticised by some hon. Members who said things along the following lines: "It does not put double glazing in a single window or cavity insulation in a single wall." I believe that such a response misses the point completely.

Does a plan for a hospital make a single person well? Does it create a single bed of itself? Of course it does not. No one says that money spent on plans for a hospital is wasted. One needs to decide where the best place is to build the hospital, what one will build it from, how many bed spaces it needs and so on. It is the same with the Home Energy Conservation Bill. The Bill is about gathering necessary information to construct a comprehensive energy conservation strategy, and it lays foundations on which all parties in the House are agreed that we need to build.

The reasons that we need to tackle energy efficiency fully are many. For most of us, greater home energy efficiency means a chance to reduce our gas and electricity bills slightly. That is very welcome. However, for some people it could mean that they will be able to heat their home adequately for the first time.

One of the memories that stays with me over the years, as someone who has been a councillor and now a Member of Parliament, is that of visiting elderly people who must remain huddled in one room all winter because they cannot afford to heat anywhere else. It should not have to happen in the 1990s.

The Government accept that, to protect our environment, energy efficiency is the quickest and most cost-effective way of reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to the greenhouse effect. We have a target, set by the Prime Minister at the 1992 Rio summit, of returning emission of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

However, 25 per cent. of that reduction was supposed to have been accounted for by the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel. Now that that second stage of tax has been defeated—for which I am thankful—there is a huge hole in the Government's strategy for achieving their target. We must fill that hole very soon because, in March, the United Kingdom will be represented at the Berlin environmental summit, the first summit of the countries that have ratified the Rio climate change convention. A recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows that we are far short of the reductions necessary to stabilise those emissions.

In addition, investing in energy conservation work is a very efficient way of creating jobs and boosting our economy. The main study carried out in the United Kingdom by the Association for the Conservation of Energy suggests that 500,000 jobs could be created over a period. The net cost per job year is estimated to be about £23,000. Most of the jobs created are relatively low-skilled occupations, and I believe that they would be concentrated in areas where there are both many unemployed people and many poorly insulated homes.

Investing in warmer homes improves people's health. There have been reports about that very recently. Research by the Standing Conference on Public Health shows that people living in colder homes tend to have poorer health, as a result of the cold itself and the damp that it causes. It is thought that there are potential savings of billions of pounds to the national health service if we rectify poor housing.

Above all, energy is big business. We spend £50 billion nationally on energy per year.

Action is needed. Last year, a poll was conducted before the Second Reading of the Energy Conservation Bill. Although one must be slightly sceptical about polls of Members of Parliament, seven out of 10 Members wanted a more strategic approach to energy conservation.

Support for the Bill has grown and grown. It will not only help our environment; it will help people. It will help those who are at present in homes that are cold or damp.

Finally, I should like to paint for hon. Members a vivid picture that I have of when I first was an elected person, helping people. I went into a home where the bathroom and kitchen were covered in black mould—a decent house, not insulated, where there was not enough money to pay for heating. As I present the Bill to the House, I have that picture. We have the opportunity to make that picture something that is of the past and will not happen again.

Welcome though the debate is, we have discussed the matter for far too long. There is much agreement. There is so much support that surely now is the time for action—to make possible a truly comprehensive, integrated energy conservation policy for the nation.

I commend the Bill to the House.

10.5 am

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I am pleased to have the opportunity of congratulating the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on her good fortune in the ballot and on introducing the Bill. I assure her that she has absolutely nothing to fear from having the privilege of introducing legislation. It has always, I think, been a belief of every Back-Bench Member of the House that the Government do not have a monopoly of introducing legislation, and that Back Benchers make an extremely valuable contribution to the sum of legislation on the statute book. I say that with the experience of having introduced seven Private Members' Bills of my own, all of which are now Acts of Parliament.

I am strongly in favour of energy conservation measures. They are, as the hon. Lady rightly said, highly desirable in contributing to the health and happiness of the nation, and they should be supported wherever possible.

I have welcomed the steps that the Government have taken to make our homes warmer and to prevent the waste of energy, and I am pleased to welcome the Bill as a further step in that process, which I hope will not stop here, but will make further progress in the years to come.

The Bill is, if I may say so with due respect to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), an improvement on the Bill that was introduced by him in the previous Session. I am sure that his wise advice has been available to the hon. Lady, drawing on the benefit of his experience on Report, which has now produced an admirable measure, which is obviously very much more acceptable to Members of the House.

The hon. Lady has removed some of the more bureaucratic provisions that led to the belief by some hon. Members that there would be unnecessary intrusion into private homes, which was implied by the need for expensive, intrusive energy audits of the type which, if they are carried to excess by local authorities, can sometimes lead to problems. They were an important feature of the Bill introduced by the right hon. Gentleman in the previous Session. That should mean that activity of local authorities as a result of the Bill will, as far as possible, be simply an extension of what the Government encourage them to do as part of the housing investment programme and within existing local government and housing legislation.

However, the Bill goes some way to achieving laudable aims that add to the policies that are being pursued by the Government with widespread and, I believe, cross-party support. I have been a great enthusiast for the Government's energy efficiency scheme. As hon. Members know, last year, the Chancellor doubled public spending on that scheme so that, for the first time, everyone aged more than 60 became eligible for a grant. I am sure that that has been extremely successful and I welcome the additional £10 million that the Chancellor announced in his Budget statement.

I have seen at first hand the tremendous benefit that is conferred on people by the scheme, particularly in the many old homes that are not energy efficient. We are proud of the number of listed buildings that we have in our country and of the towns, cities and villages whose character is enhanced by buildings constructed many years ago. All those buildings, almost without exception, are not energy efficient. The use of the energy scheme introduced by the Government means that draughts are excluded and elderly people living in those houses are, for the first time, warm and comfortable—a tremendous advance in our time. I hope that we can go further. The scheme starts when one reaches the age of 60 which, in 1994, is a comparatively young age in terms of the human life span, so the scheme provides for many people the prospect of living in warm and comfortable homes for the rest of their lives.

The hon. Lady's Bill goes further. It is an imaginative measure, which I warmly welcome. I wish her every success in piloting the Bill on to the statute book and will be there to support her.

10.10 am

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate and support the Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on her good fortune in coming at the top of the ballot. I hope that she will have the good fortune to persuade the Government, this time, to allow her measure to pass on to the statute book.

I see that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), is in his place. The original Bill introduced two years ago included his name in the list of sponsors. I hope that he will now ensure that the Bill passes through the House.

I always warn people that, when there appears to be consensus in the House, the House is sometimes at its most dangerous. I should like the Bill to be passed, but I do not think that it is worth passing unless we consider its financial implications. When I challenged the hon. Lady earlier to say how the measures contained in the Bill would be financed, she stressed that it would not cost local authorities very much. She said that the measure merely drew up a plan, and nobody would criticise a plan for a hospital.

But there is no point in planning for a hospital unless there is a realistic opportunity to build that hospital. The same is true of the Bill—it is important that we have a proper energy audit of all buildings in the country, but unless there is a realistic chance of carrying out the energy efficiency measures proved necessary by the audit, there is little point in drawing up the plan.

Mrs. Maddock: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we are to do what he would like to see happen, the Bill is an extremely important first step, and that without it we cannot take the action that the hon. Gentleman would like to see?

Mr. Bennett: I accept that the measure is an important first step, which is why I congratulated the hon. Lady. But it is important that, in passing it, the House faces up to the question of how to finance the work that the measure will show to be necessary.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): While I accept my hon. Friend's point—that we must consider the Bill's financing—does he think that it is ironic that we should be discussing the Bill's financing and whether it will be possible when, every year, we spend more than £100 million on research and development in the nuclear industry? A transfer of money may be a way of helping to finance the measure.

Mr. Bennett: I see all sorts of ways of financing the measure, but I want to stress that it is important for the House to consider the implications of the financing. I accept that, if we draw the attention of individual home owners to the fact that their houses are energy inefficient, a small number of them will have the spare resources to take some action.

But the majority of individuals will not have the resources to implement the necessary energy efficiency measures. It is important for us to look at ways in which home owners may be able to obtain extra loans from

[Mr. Bennett]

building societies to implement measures that are in their best interests, and the possibility of grants and other provisions.

My two local authorities—Tameside and Stockport—and Manchester city council, in its overspill housing, have programmes for energy efficiency for their council houses, but they are unable to carry out the measures on as many dwellings as they would like each year. We will provide little consolation to those authorities if we tell them to draw up plans to demonstrate that many of their council houses are energy inefficient, and pass that information on to the occupiers of those houses, unless we can provide them with the resources to carry out the necessary measures.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that not the least important aspect of this very valuable measure is that of public information and knowledge? If more householders were aware of the considerable savings that they were able to make, I am sure that many of them would, by hook or by crook, find ways of obtaining the capital investment required to save them a great deal in the long term. If, as a community, we put resources into such schemes, we would make greater savings than we would by investing money in trying to find alternative means of energy that might be controversial.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that such an investment would be a good one, but I would argue that it is a good investment for those individuals who are able to borrow the money to invest, and for the community. I am suggesting that, if we introduce the measure, we must address the question of how we are to find that investment—whether through making it possible for individuals to borrow the money to invest in energy efficiency or by making it possible for local authorities and others to borrow the money.

Mr. Shersby: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bennett: I am trying to make a speech, and I realise that many other hon. Members want to speak. I do not mind giving way, but I must try to make progress after the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr. Shersby: Surely the point of the hon. Lady's Bill is to ensure that local authorities have a plan and address the problem—in that way, householders' attention is also drawn to the problem. Some householders can carry out their own energy efficiency work and local authorities can take advantage of the Government's energy efficiency schemes—the two will come together.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that argument in part, but I stress that my authorities, Stockport and Tameside, have plans for carrying out energy efficiency measures, but the capital schemes currently in operation slow down the progress that they can make. In welcoming the measure, we must consider how to pay for it. There is no simple solution—it is a complex subject.

The report of the Select Committee on the Environment is one of which the Minister can be proud—he was the Chairman of that Select Committee. I hope that when he speaks later today, he will not only welcome the Bill but say how many of the recommendations in his report—we made few amendments to it in Committee—will be implemented. One of the key questions in the report is how energy efficiency is to be financed.

The hon. Lady mentioned the fact that, following the Rio summit, we have a commitment to stabilise carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2000. It is estimated that, in order to achieve that goal, carbon dioxide emissions have to be reduced by 10 million tonnes of carbon. As a result of the changes in the Government's policy on value added tax, about 7 per cent. of that target cannot now be achieved.

I never believed that VAT on fuel would motivate people to make the savings for which the Government hoped. Another 15 per cent. is to come from increases in fuel duties—although I am not convinced that that has changed people's attitudes towards energy conservation. Between 25 and 30 per cent. of the saving is to come from the activities of the Energy Saving Trust, as well as various other measures.

In early debate on the subject, the Government informed us that they could find 75 per cent. of the required cuts in CO_2 emissions. Almost half those cuts have now disappeared through changes in policy, so it is important that the Government explain how they will achieve their target.

I understand the Government's previous main argument: the Energy Saving Trust was to be the main mechanism for providing grants and encouraging people to conserve energy. I do not approve of setting up quangos, but that quango was going to raise its money from the levy—some people would call it a tax—imposed on the privatised gas and electricity industries and, as such, would not be subject to Treasury rules on public expenditure: it would count as private expenditure. It was a very neat move by the Government. They suggested that the Energy Saving Trust should spend almost £1 billion per year over the next few years in pushing energy conservation in this country.

The Select Committee inquiry found that the Energy Saving Trust had some prospects of obtaining money via the gas regulator, but not via the electricity industry. The fundamental question that we must ask the Minister is: how will the Energy Saving Trust be funded?

The situation has grown dramatically worse since the Environment Select Committee inquiry. We now know that the new gas regulator is determined that the gas industry will not make a significant contribution to the Energy Saving Trust. The trust is the mechanism through which the Government can encourage energy conservation, but, unless they can finance the trust, I cannot see how it will deliver effectively the substantial energy savings that are required.

I believe that the gas regulator has got it wrong: she has a very narrow view of her responsibilities to the consumer, and she seems to be interested only in gas prices next year. I believe that we should take a much longer-term view of the price of gas in this country and the present "dash for gas". Sooner or later—it may be later than some people think— we will face a shortage of natural gas, and the gas regulator should take that into account. It might be in the country's long-term environmental interests to introduce mechanisms to discourage the use of natural gas, which will reduce carbon dioxide emissions dramatically and ensure that we achieve the Rio target.

As the gas regulator is totally independent of Government—or so she claims—if she says that the Energy Saving Trust will receive no significant funds via the gas industry, the Government must come up with a means of financing the trust.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. As the matter is slightly outside the Bill's framework, I will address it now.

I note what the hon. Gentleman has said about the gas regulator, and I am sure that he will make his views known to her in vigorous terms. However, she is considering three schemes, and we are awaiting her decision on the matter. We will obviously continue to review the organisation and financing of the Energy Saving Trust, and we hope to come to some conclusion as soon as the regulator's position is clear.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the Minister. Having written the Select Committee report, I am sure that he will appreciate that, even if the regulator approves the three schemes to which he referred, it will fall far short of the amount of money that, as Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, he thought was needed to make the Energy Saving Trust work; and, at that stage, thought would be provided by the gas industry.

I welcome the fact that the regulator is looking at three possible schemes, but if the measure goes through and local authorities carry out the audits quickly, the Energy Saving Trust will need money in order to offer grants and perhaps guarantee loans. Its needs will be far greater than its resources.

In welcoming the Bill, it is clear that the House must take the debate further: it has to look very seriously at the way in which we can finance energy savings. I suggest that the Government must look at the problem of first-time home buyers, may of whom borrow all the money they can afford—or that the building societies and banks think they can afford—merely to purchase a property.

Perhaps the Government could implement a grant or loan system which would allow first-time home buyers to borrow a little extra money to ensure that their homes are energy efficient. That would be extremely helpful, both in terms of people's comfort and in terms of ensuring that their fuel bills are lower and they are therefore able to meet their mortgage payments. It would make sense, but it would be difficult to implement at present.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I think that the hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. An idea which is consistent with Government policy and which could be implemented easily is to allow tax relief for work that is done on a house which is deemed an energy saving and approved in that context. If the Government are looking at freezing mortgage interest tax relief or reducing it further, it could be replaced by tax relief which gives people an incentive to conserve energy. Together with better British minimum standards for energy conservation, that would make a huge difference and do a small proportion of the hon. Lady's work, even before the local authorities' reports are completed.

Mr. Bennett: That is one possible mechanism. I stress that there is a problem, particularly for first-time home buyers who move to older properties and who find it difficult to finance energy-saving measures. I hope that the Energy Saving Trust will propose some ways of assisting people in those circumstances.

We also have to address the problem in relation to elderly people. I know that the home energy efficiency scheme—draught-proofing and loft insulation—has helped some pensioners, but I believe that a lot more can be done for older people in our community by way of grants to encourage energy efficiency.

I will not list all the other measures that I think the Energy Saving Trust should implement. We have to find a way of financing them. Energy saving is clearly very important for the world environment. It is also important because it will make this country more efficient and thus make us more competitive internationally. Much of today's debate has concerned individual homes, but a lot of energy is consumed in offices and other buildings.

Although it is difficult to convince people to spend money, the small expenditure on energy-efficient measures now will mean substantial savings in the future. I hope that the Bill will raise public awareness of the problem and convince the whole country that we must take energy conservation seriously.

10.28 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. I welcome the Bill, and I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on winning the "raffle"—I think that was the expression that her right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) used when he moved the Second Reading of last year's Bill—or the "lottery", to use her own word. I am sure that she will win no further raffles or lotteries for some time, as she has used up all her available luck.

I am pleased to support the Bill, not least because its basic thrust is supported by so many of my constituents in Eastbourne. The hon. Lady was a little unfair in criticising those of us who had genuine reservations about the terms of last year's Bill. The House is often accused of legislating with too little care, at too great a speed, on too many issues. This may be a classic example—with all due respect to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed—of the need for a longer gestation.

I welcomed the opportunity to take part in the debate on last year's Energy Conservation Bill—the final debate in which Stephen Milligan, then Member of Parliament for Eastleigh, participated. He and I were good friends from Oxford days. He participated in that debate and sadly died a couple of days later. That Bill was of a rather different nature.

I congratulate the hon. Lady on three counts. I have already mentioned her good fortune. Secondly, she has taken heed of the advice of other hon. Members, and presumably of officials and Ministers, on how to achieve her objectives. Thirdly, she has taken a holiday from the sort of gesture politics of which her party is so fond. When the Bill has been fully crafted in Committee, I hope that it will make a genuine contribution.

In last February's debate, I said:

"I believe in giving credit where credit is due. The Bill is an interesting and timely piece of legislation."

I do not resile from any of that. I made the point that 30 per cent. of Eastbourne's population are over retirement age. As the hon. Lady pointed out, often they are precisely

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

the people who live in older, draughty and difficult-to-heat homes that need the sort of attention that the Bill and the other schemes might produce.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Does my hon. Friend agree that we share similar problems in respect of Department of Social Security hostels in our respective constituencies? Many inhabitants of those former hotels live in extremely draughty, cold and uncomfortable conditions—often crammed in like sardines by unscrupulous landlords. Will not the Bill go some way towards helping to alleviate the conditions in which some hostel tenants find themselves?

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend and I have worked closely on the vexing issue of DSS hostels in seaside resorts and their uncontrolled growth. It is pleasurable to note that the Government acted swiftly in terms of planning law, by changing the use classes order last year—although we still have some way to go in tackling that problem. It is a matter of ensuring the closure of hostels of the type described by my hon. Friend where they do not meet safety, insulation or other requirements; regulating hostels that come up to standard in future; and ensuring that there is not a mushrooming of new hostels of that type.

Another remark that I made in last year's debate is central to the palpable differences between last year's Bill and that now before the House:

"I am worried not only about the cost but about the potential extra bureaucracy involved. We have quite enough local and central Government officials as it is."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1994; Vol. 236, c. 1156-60.]

The Bill has attracted a wide spectrum of support throughout the country. I have, in common with other right hon. and hon. Members, received a letter from Friends of the Earth, which states:

"Energy efficiency measures are not only cost effective but can provide significant social, employment and health benefits, a reduction in household fuel bills and a reduction of the polluting gases which contribute to acid rain and climate change."

At the other end of the spectrum, the Construction Industry Council also has written to hon. Members in support of the Bill. It speaks on behalf of 330,000 construction professionals and more than 1,000 consulting firms, and makes the telling point that about half of UK energy is used in buildings, and that a modest 12 per cent. improvement in energy efficiency would achieve the Government's commitment to reduce CO_2 emissions by 6 per cent.

The CIC points out also that the Bill has the support of many organisations, such as Age Concern and Mencap, and of 700 local councils—and even now that figure may be out of date. The Bill enjoys a considerable body of support across the political spectrum and throughout the country.

Why does energy conservation matter? More than 20 per cent. of the UK's annual £50 billion energy bill could be saved through efficiency measures. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"Growth is not the enemy of the environment. Growing economies can invest in technologies which save energy and dynamic businesses can lead the way in raising the standard of corporate environmental practice . . . The environmental buck stops in our back yard."

Mrs. Maddock: In common with the hon. Gentleman's constituency, a great many elderly people live in Christchurch. However, we must not forget others—such as those in multiple occupancy—who are not elderly but live in damp, cold conditions. I hope that my Bill will address also that problem.

Mr. Waterson: I do not mean to suggest that one group is any more deserving of help than another. My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) mentioned hostels, which are a particular problem in seaside towns—although one likes to think that one attraction for many people is their slightly more clement climate, at least on the south coast.

Eastbourne has a combination of a large retirement age population and older buildings. I yield to no one in my praise for the design and layout of Eastbourne. It was planned by a previous Duke of Devonshire on a careful grid. An aerial view or a view from the sea shows just how elegantly Eastbourne was laid out from the start. That means in turn that it has many old buildings, some of which have not been kept in the state of repair they deserve, in view of their historic and architectural value.

It was a little rich of the hon. Lady, in one section of her speech that could usefully have been left on the cutting-room floor, to comment that the recent vote on increasing VAT on domestic fuel might mean the Government failing to meet their Rio objectives. I do not recall hearing the hon. Lady or any of her parliamentary colleagues making that point with passion, or at all, in the debate on that issue. If that indicates that the hon. Lady has had a lightning conversion to the genuine argument that VAT on fuel would help achieve the Rio objectives, I congratulate her on her perception.

Mrs. Maddock: The hon. Member is slightly misconstruing what I said. The people in my constituency, and indeed the people in the country—given the way in which I came to this place—can have no doubts about exactly how I and my party feel about VAT on fuel. I regret that we are still having the same argument when we have made it clear how we feel about the matter.

Mr. Waterson: If I were made of sterner stuff, I would move on to another point, but being a humble politician—one who has some experience of campaigning against Liberal Democrats—I feel that I ought in all fairness to finish the point. I know that the hon. Lady has had a lot to do with the subject of VAT on fuel, and that it was a major part of her election campaign.

I make no criticism of that, but it seems impossible to justify a situation in which this country is the only one in Europe which does not have a tax of some sort on domestic fuel. We put VAT on the material that is used to insulate one's loft to save the very fuel that is being untaxed. The hon. Lady has tried to persuade the House

that she has taken a consistent line, but there is at least a difference of emphasis between what she says when we are debating fiscal measures such as VAT, and what she says during debates on energy conversation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My hon. Friend was also discussing the Rio targets. Does he accept that the likelihood is that we shall be one of very few countries which will meet their Rio target, and that one reason is that a nuclear power generation plant which was put in an aluminium smelter will no longer be supplying the smelter because the smelter has closed, but will instead be supplying people's residential energy needs around the country? As that produces less pollution, should not the Liberal Democrats and others congratulate the nuclear industry on helping us to reach the Rio target?

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. If we are all united in the aims laid out at Rio, it is incumbent on the Opposition parties as much as the Government to come up with proposals on how we reach the target. There is no earthly point in the Opposition saying only that they believe passionately that we must get from A to B: they are obliged to give the electorate a road map to show how they intend to get from A to B.

Mr. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Government claimed that 15 per cent. of their target for cutting carbon dioxide emissions would be achieved as a result of putting VAT on fuel? I took the trouble to check on the sale of energy efficiency equipment such as roof insulation equipment in my constituency following the first increase in April. If the Government's theory was right, one would have expected that those people who could have afforded it would have improved their loft insulation and taken other measures.

I am afraid that all the evidence I got back from the Stockport and Tameside area was that the increase in VAT last April did not provoke people into going for energy-saving measures. That is sad, but the Government must tell us how they are to achieve their target. It is not for Opposition Members, who were sceptical that the measure would achieve the target in the first place, to do so.

Mr. Waterson: I cannot quarrel in any way with the hon. Gentleman's evidence from his area. I do not know whether a more systematic survey has been done across the country. If not, perhaps one ought to be made. I will also be interested to hear what has happened once the increase in VAT has had a chance to feed through the system. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I do not think that consumers necessarily react to things immediately, and it may take some time to sink in. I shall be interested to see in due course the Government's figures on the possible effect on consumption.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Is it not clear that, in real terms, domestic energy prices have been coming down? The net effect of that is that the Government's help as far as the 8 per cent. increase is concerned has been totally offset, and that the impact has, curiously enough, not been felt in people's pockets. Should not the Opposition take that on board?

Mr. Waterson: There is some truth in what my hon. Friend says. If prices continue to come down as sharply, some Opposition Members will complain that we shall be further away from reaching the Rio objectives.

Mr. Sykes: There are two Liberal Democrat Members in the Chamber on a Friday, which is extremely unusual. May I remind those Members that our proposals during the debate on the final tranche of VAT on fuel would have left the average pensioner £10 a year better off? By voting against the Government, they were voting against the interests of the very people whom they say this morning they hope to protect.

Mr. Waterson: Funnily enough, I was just about to make that point. As my hon. Friend made it with greater eloquence and fire than I could ever hope to, I need not do so.

A point which arose from the intervention by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) is that there is a danger that, simply because prices were cut—a rather simplistic mechanism from one point of view—the kind of people who might buy loft insulation would be those who were better off in any event. As practising Members of Parliament, we often see that the so-called middle classes are more able to organise their lives and to make savings, and that people who are less able to cope—who often, for example, spend money on convenience foods and so on—are not able to budget. We must combine measures to deal with the cost of energy with education and information campaigns which will attract the attention of the people we are talking about.

We have not just invented energy conservation today, or even last year when we discussed the previous Bill. Much is happening already—for example, housing renovation grants which have already been given for improving our housing stock. We in Eastbourne were particularly grateful to the Minister for giving us an extra £900,000 towards housing renovation grants this year. There is no doubt that a significant part of that money will go to achieving the kind of objectives which this debate is dealing with.

One of the things in the hon. Lady's speech with which I concur was the enthusiasm of many local authorities for energy efficiency measures of their own. The briefing from the Library makes the point that local authority investments in energy efficiency measures come to about £200 million a year already through repair and improvement programmes for their housing stock.

Finally, welcome changes have been made to the Bill brought to the House last year, and lessons have perhaps been learnt since then following amendments and points made by hon. Members.

Changes have occurred in three main areas. The first is cost. I think that the hon. Lady said that the estimated cost of the proposals in the previous Bill was £11 million, and that the cost of the proposals in her Bill would be about half that figure. If she did not say that, she can correct me. That is a plus.

Secondly, there are to be no intrusive audits of private households. Whatever the hon. Lady says about the intent of the previous Bill, there was genuine concern about that.

[Mr. Waterson]

My constituents were concerned about surveys of private housing stock, and people have a natural sensitivity to the idea of local authority officials coming to their homes, and about being unable to deny those officials access. Thirdly, there will be less bureaucracy. If the Bill is to work, it is important that it is as lean and non-bureaucratic as possible.

There are some crucial differences between this Bill and the Energy Conservation Bill. It seems that local authorities would have more scope to decide for themselves how to set about producing their energy conservation plans for residential accommodation. It would seem also—this is borne out by the House of Commons paper on the subject—that such plans would be more straightforward to produce under this measure than under the previous Bill.

In turning local housing authorities into energy conservation authorities, we must always have in mind the likely extra cost and burden that will be put on those authorities. I am confident, however, that the authorities will not be slow to point out to Members, and through them to Ministers, the extra burdens they expect.

Under clause 2, energy conservation authorities are required to

"take reasonable steps to assess or estimate"

the energy saving potential in homes in the areas for which they are responsible.

Another difference between this measure and the Energy Conservation Bill is that separate strategies to achieve less ambitious energy savings—I think that they were 10 per cent. and 20 per cent. under the Energy Conservation Bill—will no longer be required. It is important that it is now recognised that we need to build on existing schemes and initiatives. I have in mind work done by local authorities in preparing their bids for housing investment support.

Clause 3 also reflects a difference between the two Bills, in that the assessment of potential savings in fuel bills by different types of household would be a power rather than a duty. That provides an element of flexibility that a measure of this sort needs.

Under the Energy Conservation Bill, a list was produced of those who had to be consulted—consultees—whereas, under this Bill, the energy conservation authority, or ECA, as no doubt it will come to be called, may

"consult such persons as it considers appropriate."

That is another example of greater flexibility.

Clause 4(3)—not the clause IV—is a relatively little-known provision. It allows the Secretary of State to

"vary any timetable or timetables"

in a way that presumably would allow him to take account of different local circumstances. That is what appears in the Library analysis. As that was not stated so explicitly in the Energy Conservation Bill, it seems that there will be greater flexibility for local authorities in deciding what they should and should not put in their reports. I hope that that is the position, but that can be explored in Committee.

Clause 5 makes it abundantly clear that there will be no powers of entry to properties. That I welcome. As a Conservative Member, I consider that a prerequisite of proposed legislation of this sort. The Conservative party does not believe that people's individual property rights should be trampled upon, even in support of a great good such as energy conservation.

I am delighted to have had the chance to talk about the Bill, as I spoke on the Energy Conservation Bill. This measure is a significant improvement on its predecessor. It is an example of how the parliamentary process can improve legislation. I am convinced that the Bill will be improved yet further in Committee.

10.53 am

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): It is a pleasure to support the Bill. As I think that this is the fourth time that the House has considered such a measure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must not detain you too long. Given the size and extent of the problems and issues, including environmental, energy and social matters, the Bill is, in many ways, a modest measure. It is important, however, because it opens up, potentially, a new chapter in our attack on energy inefficiency and on cold conditions, which I recognise to be one of the major health problems in the United Kingdom. I want to talk about the health aspect of the Bill and how decent energy efficiency measures can attack health problems.

About the first job that I undertook in my career as a young social scientist was to work on a multidisciplinary study into the problems of low body temperature—hypothermia—and cold homes as they affected elderly people. I was involved in a national survey that was undertaken with doctors and scientists in 1972 and I produced a book called "Old and Cold" in 1978, which dealt with the issues.

In the early 1980s, I went on a short lecture tour in this country with an eminent doctor from Norway, who was an expert on the problems of cold injury and cold winter mortality. When I first met him, I asked, "Tell me, Doctor, in your country do you have a major worry, as we do, about the problem of hypothermia?" He replied, "Yes, of course. I see it in my hospital. Our young people go out on treks across the country in winter, sometimes foolishly when it is icy and the ground is covered by snow. Some become hypothermic. Sometimes, body temperatures fall to dangerously low levels."

The conversation continued. I said, "Yes, I understand what you have said. We have the same problem, but I am talking about something rather different—hypothermia as it affects old people in their own homes." The doctor looked at me with an air of great puzzlement and said, "Sorry, I don't understand—in their own homes?" I replied, "Yes. The evidence shows that significant proportions of our elderly populations—those in their 80s and 90s, particularly—have low body temperatures. Every year, hundreds of deaths, sometimes a thousand, are associated with low body temperatures, mainly among old people in their own homes." The doctor could not really understand the discussion, so uncommon was the problem in his country and in Scandinavia generally, countries that are far colder than the United Kingdom in winter.

Part of the explanation is that, in the colder countries of Europe, an awareness of the cold is built into cultures and homes. Through high standards of energy efficiency, draught-proofing and insulation, they do not have the national scandal with which we still have to grapple. There are still people in this country who are both old and

cold. Every year, too many of our oldest and frailest citizens die because of the impact of cold in their own homes.

The evidence is still startling. A comparison is to be drawn between the number of people who die in the summer and those who die in the winter. In the six winter months of 1991-92—October 1991 to March 1992—304,000 of our citizens died. In the preceding summer months—April to September—256,000 died. About 48,000 more people died in the winter. As for those aged 85 years and over, 25 per cent. more deaths occurred in winter than in summer.

Although the deaths to which I have referred are associated with many different causes, most are due to two general medical conditions, respiratory conditions such as broncho-pneumonia and circulatory conditions. There are more heart attacks in winter. Although the numbers of those dying from hypothermia may seem to be relatively low, I put it to the House that the problem of excess winter mortality is directly associated with energy inefficiency, poor draught-proofing and poor insulation, which are producing tremendous mortality figures.

Much of our discussion is rightly concerned with energy efficiency and the environmental and housing impact of the Bill, but we should realise that its provisions could make a major contribution to the health of the nation. One of the great health scandals in this country is the problem of the old and cold and excess winter mortality. I repeat the point—the Department of Health journal "Health Trends" presented data on this subject—that in Europe one does not see excess winter mortality to anything like the same extent as in our country. Therefore, my contribution is mainly on that point.

The House would find it very difficult indeed to find a measure that hits so many of the targets that we should hit. I believe that the Bill, although modest, could open up a whole new chapter in that part of public policy. It makes social, economic and environmental sense. It makes environmental sense for the reasons that have been discussed. It was mischievous of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) to tease the Liberal party on value added tax, because in our quest to obtain the Rio targets and our concern about CO_2, surely there are ways in which we can hit the goals that we want to hit, ways which are socially beneficial rather than socially harmful. Yes, high VAT on fuel may help with the Rio targets, but it would not have helped—indeed, it would have worsened—the problem of the old and cold. This measure, if it were followed through into a programme of public policy, would make not only environmental sense but social sense.

The Bill makes economic sense, too, because at a time when, to be profitable, more and more of our major industries say that they must shed labour, we need to develop programmes that can employ labour. The rather modest projects that we have now, such as the home energy efficiency scheme, are not only a training ground for young people with the required skills but employment programmes. One of the paradoxes of Britain in the 1990s is that, at a time when so many people are unemployed because they cannot find work, there is clearly so much vital work that needs to be done. Energy inefficiency is a major example of that.

For social, economic, employment, environmental and energy reasons, so that we can finally consign into the dustbin of our social history the terrible problem of the old and cold, the House should support this important measure.

11.2 am

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to say a few words this morning. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) not only on having the good fortune to get this lucky Christmas cracker but on arguing her case coherently and fluently. She commended her Bill to the House well.

It is also true to say that those outside the House who look at our proceedings on television often see us confronting one another in a rather harsh fashion across party political lines. Therefore, on an issue that is so vital to so many people—energy conservation and how it affects their lives—it is particularly welcome that there is cross-party support on this occasion.

I read somewhere that the hon. Member for Christchurch was moved by the plight of pensioners in her constituency and that that helped her to form her own view and to introduce the Bill, but, of course, there are a number of other aspects to this matter. I shall relate one of my own experiences, as I was affected by the way in which elderly people react to the cold and concerned about what they should do about it.

I was canvassing in a by-election campaign and went into an elderly lady's flat. She was sitting in a small room, covered with a blanket, a matter of inches away from a small bar heater. The central heating was on. As I walked into the room, it was like being pushed over by a wall of the most immense heat; it must have been more than 90 deg fahrenheit. She said, "Please shut the door. It is so dreadfully cold in here." That fact is that old people do feel the cold. It is true of all of us that, when we are not particularly mobile on a cold winter's day, we feel the cold, too. For many elderly people, that is a special problem. We have all seen that at different times when visiting elderly people in our constituencies.

It is also true that, at times, many elderly people have an unwarranted concern about money. All of us who have elderly relatives know that even those who perhaps do not really need to have that worry do fret. On the other hand, many elderly people who feel the cold feel constrained to do something about it, to keep their houses warm, even if they are personally well resourced, because of their own personal financial concerns. That combination is at the heart of all our concerns about providing adequate insulation in their homes.

In December last year, during energy efficiency week, I visited an elderly constituent's home. It had been insulated under the home energy efficiency scheme. It was a real joy to go into the elderly lady's bungalow, because the scheme had been undertaken with great effect. It was said to me by an official of the Energy Action Grants Agency that her heating bills were likely to come down by some 30 per cent. but that her comfort level would be up by some 70 per cent. All the irritating draughts that had caused all her discomfort had been removed. She was happy and so was I.

It is true, therefore, that that scheme has been welcomed by all Members of Parliament as they see it carried out in their constituencies. Like my hon. Friend

[Mr. Richard Spring]

the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), I very much welcome the fact that the funding for the scheme has increased and that the number of houses that could be insulated has been increased. In 1995-96, some 600,000 schemes will be looked at and dealt with under the scheme—up from 440,000 in 1994-95. In April last year, an extra £35 million was put into the scheme to cover those on disability living allowance, and, of course, all those over the age of 60.

The scheme—we have seen its effects—is limited to draught-proofing and insulation. I mention that because the Bill today brings together all the elements of heat conservation under a central Government umbrella but is implemented by local housing authorities. As we have heard, it gives power to the Secretary of State to set a timetable for the implementation of residential energy conservation plans drawn up and implemented by local authorities. It is a good marriage, a good straddle, between central Government and local government.

I understand that some 700 local councils have already given the Bill their backing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said, all of us have had letters from a number of diverse organisations, including Friends of the Earth and the Construction Industry Council, applauding the Bill. I should like to place on record the efforts of local authorities in my constituency to improve energy conservation and improve the housing stock under their control. In a sense, the culture of what the Bill is trying to achieve is already in place, but the Bill gives it a coherence and carries it on.

There are two local councils in my constituency—St. Edmundsbury borough council and Forest Heath district council. St. Edmundsbury set an objective of reducing energy consumption by 10 to 20 per cent. over a five-year period. It is also part of its corporate energy plan to purchase fuel at competitive rates. It wants to raise awareness in its area of the need for energy conservation. It was on that basis and in that spirit that the council signed the Department of the Environment's corporate commitment campaign in line with the Rio accord.

By March 1995, 2,500 homes in the borough's ownership will be up to full insulation standards. This year, £750,000 has been pledged to double-glaze windows, replace boilers and improve insulation further. As a result of that move, which I have encouraged and endorsed, all the council's sheltered housing schemes are above the current standards for insulation. The net effect of that for the elderly has been a reduction in heating charges.

The council has been promoting the home energy efficiency scheme in its area; indeed, it has undertaken an energy audit of all its housing stock to determine how energy conservation can be improved. However, although that may be happening with my local council, it is not necessarily the case universally, despite all the help and encouragement that the Government have given. The Bill will, therefore, give coherence to the move towards energy conservation. It will enhance the culture of energy conservation and encourage further thinking about the energy problems of the future.

The council summed up its endorsement of the Bill by saying:

"The Council very much welcomes this approach and would look to being actively involved in the work should the Bill be successful."

I am sure that, possibly with a few amendments, the Bill will be successful. The culture of energy conservation is alive and well in my constituency and will be further stimulated when the Bill is enacted.

Forest Heath district council has carried out a full assessment of its housing stock of 3,436 dwellings. Some 60 per cent. of the properties have been double-glazed, compared with only 21 per cent. nationally; 37 per cent. have cavity wall insulation, compared with only 29 per cent. nationally; 96 per cent. have central heating—the only reason it is not 100 per cent. is that 4 per cent. did not want it—compared with 78 per cent. nationally; and 100 per cent. have loft insulation, compared with 43 per cent. nationally. The council has an energy efficiency programme for insulation and double glazing. It, too, has welcomed the Bill.

If I may be partisan for a moment, I want to point out that all the improvements that have been made successfully by both councils have not resulted in any increase in council tax for the forthcoming year. Both councils are Conservative controlled.

One feature of the Bill is the focus on houses that are owned by the energy conservation authority—the local authority. It also opens up the possibility that, at the request of private home owners, works could be carried out in the private sector. There is no element of compulsion or of inspectors demanding that that should happen; it is entirely voluntary. It will encourage the whole culture and understanding of this important subject—and, as 70 per cent. of the housing stock in Britain is owner-occupied, that is important.

The practicality of energy conservation is an important factor. Many people wanting to improve their homes seek advice, some of which can be quite contradictory. Under the Bill, they will be able to obtain expert advice from individuals in an agreed and wholly professional manner. That is excellent news.

In August 1992, the home energy efficiency scheme undertook a survey of the grants that it had made and discovered that two thirds of the recipients would not have carried out the energy efficiency work without help from the scheme. The Bill will move that process along in a variety of ways.

We need to consider another factor relating to the macro-economic picture over the past eight years. There has been an extraordinary cycle in commercial and residential property: there was considerable housing construction activity throughout the industrialised world in the late 1980s, followed in the early 1990s by a slump across the industrialised world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said, the building trade will be helped by the spillover effect of the insulation and energy conservation improvements that we believe are desirable. It is a powerful stimulus to many people in areas where the residential building sector has been under serious pressure. That economic spillover effect is wholly beneficial.

Mr. Sykes: I do not know whether I have previously mentioned to my hon. Friend that, during the past year, my home has been totally renovated. As part of that, it has been completely insulated, with many conservation aspects being incorporated in the design of the house. I have been astonished by the amount of money saved on

my gas bills since then. Should not the Bill send out the message that major savings can be made, to the benefit of home economics?

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is right. His experience shows that such a message should go out. I had the pleasure of having my hon. Friend as a house guest recently. He knows that in that very flat part of East Anglia—west Suffolk—the wind comes straight across from the Urals, so it is not always easy completely to insulate houses from the cold. I am sure that when he was staying with me, he noticed the conservation measures that have been undertaken in my cottage. I am sure that he was comfortable.

As I said, the Bill will stimulate employment through work on energy conservation improvements. Some 25 per cent. of heat is lost through an uninsulated roof and 20 per cent. escapes through windows and under doors. That adds up to a massive cost for the nation. It is estimated that, with the right conservation measures, a 20 per cent. saving could be achieved in our national £50 billion energy bill. We know that; in providing a national residential energy efficiency map, the Bill will give an overall strategic coherence to further possible measures to cut heat waste. The environmental advantages are self-evident.

For some years, the Government have been laying the foundations for energy conservation via many schemes and inducements. The Bill encapsulates those and takes on what has been achieved. I wish the Bill well and have great pleasure in supporting it.

11.19 am

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I am pleased to be one of the sponsors of the Bill whose promoter, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), will receive credit from three sources. She will be praised not only by the House and Parliament but by our people and by the planet as a whole. She is entitled to bask in some of the glory that will flow from that. I want to speak about those three sources in turn.

First, the House ought to be grateful for the Bill, because in no small way it will help the country to meet the international obligations that we undertook at the Rio summit in terms of attempting to reduce to 1990 levels our emissions of CO_2 by the year 2000. It will also help to reduce associated greenhouse gases in line with some of our other undertakings at Rio.

The Bill is a practical application of Lord Healey's dictum about the first law of holes: "When you are in one, stop digging." Reducing emissions to the 1990 level would be an important benchmark, if not an end in itself. In practical terms, this country has undertaken to reduce CO_2 emissions by some 10 million tonnes. In domestic terms, that entails a commitment to reduce emissions from households by, I think, 4 million tonnes. There are arguments as to whether that is a sufficiently high and rigorous target.

In the other place, Lord Ezra suggested that the target that the country had set itself was far from ambitious. He said:

"more affluent countries such as the United Kingdom should be aiming to reduce emissions significantly below 1990 levels. Such an example is being set by Denmark, which is seeking a reduction of 20 per cent. by the year 2000, and by Germany, which is targeting a reduction of 25 to 30 per cent. by the year 2005. Why is the UK being so modest?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 June 1993; Vol. 546, c. 1720-21.]

I think that the United Kingdom's target is a modest reduction of 6 per cent. Lord Ezra went on to speak about the intergovernmental conference in Berlin in March and said that the report presented to the conference suggested that present emission targets fell far short of the reductions that are necessary to stabilise the accumulating atmospheric concentrations of CO_2 at today's level.

That is an important backcloth to the debate, and we may want to engage in continuing debate about the pace of energy conservation work. However, we ought not to confuse that with the consensus on the Bill about the direction of change. It is easier to get people to act virtuously if they do not have to live their lives miserably, and the Bill will make its most significant and immediate contribution at that people-focused level.

Sadly, winter cold still claims the lives of some 50,000 people in our country. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) for spelling out how that is broken down. The statistics are a sad fact of life and death. We must add the harder-to-quantify figure of the millions more who are miserably cold, poor and unhappy because of fuel poverty. That is the context in which the House must commit itself to treat the British public no less favourably than Governments across Scandinavia treat their citizens. It is right for my hon. Friend to set that down as a legitimate point of comparison for where we are now.

I should like to pay a couple of tributes. This is the 10th anniversary of a campaign that was started in my city of Nottingham by the local paper, the *Nottingham Evening Post*. Every year it has run a hat campaign in relation to the old and cold, and it has been a source of constant and quite proper irritation for local and national politicians. That newspaper has been unapologetic in its pursuit of a claim that we ought to treat the fuel-poor better than we have treated them in the past. It has constantly badgered politicians and the public, reminding us of the stark personal facts of fuel poverty.

I congratulate that paper on doing that and on running a practical campaign. It set up a winter fuel fund from which some 2,500 families have been helped to meet fuel bills that they would otherwise not have been able to pay. That local, practical contribution is worth acknowledging and praising. But that newspaper would be the first to acknowledge that we need a national policy on energy conservation rather than simply an appeal to individual conscience.

In that context, I should like to focus on the actions of Nottingham city council. Many of those actions have been pioneered by the leader of the council, Councillor John Taylor.

The council has already set itself a target of reducing its internal energy consumption by 30 per cent. In addition, it wants to explore ways to contribute not only to the campaign in support of the Bill, but to determine the practicalities of what it would mean on the ground. In Nottingham's case it is in the air, because this month it is undertaking a thermal imaging scan of the whole city. I shall deal with some of the practicalities of that. One of the reasons for the scan is that even from the initial surveys and calculations of energy saving potential in the city, the council realised that Nottingham stands to save about £20 million a year simply by reducing wasted

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

domestic energy costs if houses across the city are properly insulated. The council knows that one of Nottingham's current contributions to atmospheric pollution is some 750,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide. To tackle that locally makes a small but significant contribution to Britain's overall commitment.

The thermal imaging survey has been planned in partnership with a number of local businesses, and its total cost is some £17,000. I should like to refer to some of the pilot costings per household to individual authorities. During the Second Reading debate on the Energy Conservation Bill last year, the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), said:

"Newark and Sherwood district council . . . estimates that it would cost £1 per dwelling. Derby district council . . . estimates that it would cost 53p per dwelling."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1994; Vol. 236, c. 1196.]

He said that, if those costs were replicated by other local authorities, the cost of setting up databases throughout the United Kingdom would be between £11 million and £23 million.

In Nottingham, the total cost of the thermal imaging survey is working out at 17p per household. Members of the public will be able to identify their house and the heat wasted from it at the time of the survey. The city council generously offered the facility to adjoining district councils. Broxtowe, which is Conservative-controlled, has agreed to take part and its contribution is £400. Sadly, the other adjoining council in the flight path, Rushcliffe, which is represented in Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has so far declined to take part. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would be considerably distressed to learn that that borough council is not prepared to pay for such a survey. Even if the costs of participating in it were doubled to take into account presentations of its findings to the public, they would amount to no more than 2p per household. It is a sad fact that that borough is not prepared to pay 2p to take part in a thermal imaging survey and to find out how much heat is needlessly wasted by the Chancellor's constituents.

I welcome the fact that the Bill contains a commitment to obligations and duties. I am not concerned about the best local authorities and was pleased to hear hon. Members on both sides of the House describe the work that those authorities have done. That is a real tribute to energy consciousness. We ought not to confuse ourselves into believing, however, that that necessarily speaks for the entire country. By building obligations into the Bill, it will require the rest of the country to set itself standards that the best are already achieving. We must also offer encouragement, which is clearly an important part of the process of making the country energy conscious.

Increasing the price of fuel has been mentioned. It is recognised that one of the problems with increasing the cost of domestic fuel is that it is demand-inelastic. Reduced fuel consumption is not entirely governed by people's bills. When faced with a choice between heating and eating, poor people do not always choose to eat. There is an inevitability about fuel bills—they arrive, and they have to be paid— and in many cases higher fuel bills are making people unnecessarily ill.

Although occupants might find it cost-effective to insulate their homes, it might be outside their power to decide. They might be the tenants of private landlords, or they might not have the means to pay for insulation.

I ask hon. Members who are concerned about that problem to consider the next private Member's Bill on the Order Paper, which was submitted in conjunction with this Bill, and picks up on a suggestion by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer—that it is absurd to tax conservation more heavily than the use of energy. The Energy-Saving Materials (Rate of Value Added Tax) Bill reflects the spirit of those views and suggests a practical application. It would reduce the rate of value added tax on home insulation materials, and I hope that the Minister will support not only the Home Energy Conservation Bill but the following one. I shall gladly give way if he wants to confirm that that is his intention.

We must consider ways in which incentives can be built in to encourage people to insulate their homes. I am sure that the Government will do so when considering this Bill. It is part and parcel of their programme in many ways. We might have to consider the pace and comprehensiveness of the incentives. Costs will be involved. As a society, however, we shall reap only what we are prepared to sow. By meeting the initial costs associated with a comprehensive home energy saving commitment, we would be saving ourselves money in the medium term, we would certainly be saving lives and we would meet the international obligations that we set ourselves.

How do we meet those costs? There are two ways. We provide a subsidy of more than £100 million for research and development costs to the nuclear industry. We might get greater mileage for that money if we directed it towards home insulation. The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said that the Liberal Democrats ought to be more supportive of the nuclear industry because of its contribution to energy conservation. We ought to recognise, however, that pollution comes not merely in the form of greenhouse gases, which can be measured. The nuclear industry may well be delivering forms of pollution that will usher us to our graves and leave a legacy for many millennia.

The energy supply industries must be seen to be significant contributors to the cost of reducing energy consumption, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have said. As a society, we cannot live profitably and safely simply by increasing that consumption.

Mr. Spring: I do not want to be partisan, as this has so far been an agreeable cross-party process, but is the Labour party dedicated to doing away with nuclear power and to decommissioning existing nuclear power stations?

Mr. Simpson: I want to describe the policy that I hope we shall run with. I am simply saying that we delude ourselves if we believe that the nuclear energy industry does not contribute to pollution. If we carried out an audit of pollution that considered the longer-term perspective of people's lives, as well as the short term, we might well come to a different conclusion about the public costs of going down the nuclear path.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman did not answer the question on Labour's nuclear policy, but that is a typical

feature of life with Labour. There has not been a shred of evidence that anyone's health in this country has been damaged by nuclear power.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It is not advisable for hon. Members to continue to go down that road.

Mr. Simpson: May I just point out that the word "Chernobyl" should focus not only the minds of hon. Members—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that I speak plain English. I said that it would not be wise to go down that road and the hon. Gentleman must not do so.

Mr. Simpson: I had reached my concluding sentence before the hon. Gentleman intervened.

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to confirm that the Government will support this Bill and the Bill that follows. The House needs to send out a message to the whole country that we are serious about home energy conservation. If we pass the Bill, we shall be thanked for generations to come by a public who could not only lead more comfortable and secure lives through the winter but do so in the knowledge that they were contributing to the safety and stability of the planet.

11.40 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) clearly recognises his role as my cue man. Obviously I shall say something about the Bill, but, as with all good detective stories, we shall have the denouement once we have heard the details of the plot.

First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on securing first place in the ballot. If she is a biblical scholar like me, she will remember that many are called and few are chosen, which certainly applies to private Members' Bills. I hark back to the occasion when I, too, was fortunate in the ballot and introduced my Hedgerow Protection Bill, which was subsequently blocked by the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). The hon. Lady's Bill may have a more fortunate outcome. In presenting this Bill to the House, she gives us a further opportunity to discuss the important subject of energy efficiency.

As several hon. Members said, we had a number of debates in the previous Session relating to the Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). Although I am keen not only on energy conservation but on recycling, I do not want to recycle the speeches that I made on other occasions, because this Bill has different features. Although it resembles the right hon. Gentleman's Bill in a number of respects, as the hon. Lady said, it has been changed in others, partly in response to some of the points made by the Government during the proceedings on the earlier Bill, and partly in response to comments made by other hon. Members.

Mr. Beith: The Minister is right to say that the Bill has been modified in a number of respects, partly in response to comments that he made. I should put it on record, however, that I expressed willingness at every stage to do the same a year ago, but the Bill was obstructed in ways that suggested that, at that time, the Government were more hostile to the Bill as a whole than anxious to amend it. Perhaps the work that the Minister is now doing has led to a welcome change in the Government's approach.

Mr. Jones: I was not privy to discussions at the time. I get little access to historical records, because I must plough through all the negotiations that took place at the time.

I certainly welcome the opportunity provided by the Bill to reaffirm the Government's commitment to energy conservation and, in particular, to the efficient use of energy to run our homes and businesses. That makes sense for the national and global environment, the health of our economy and the people who live in the properties concerned.

The many steps that we have taken to promote energy efficiency, to which I shall refer later, are evidence of our commitment, and I hope that our debates on this Bill will provide a valuable discussion of and focus on how we can best facilitate the greater energy efficiency which we all believe would be desirable. That is what underlies the consensus approach of some of today's speeches.

With 25 per cent. of carbon dioxide emissions attributable to energy used in the home, the Bill addresses an important sector. We now have an opportunity to discuss—I hope continuing in a constructive way—how to make the best use of the substantial experience and information already available. The support from organisations and groups to which the hon. Lady and others have referred shows that there is much enthusiasm for and interest in energy efficiency in the country.

The focus of the Bill is energy use in the home. Reductions have an immediate benefit for the householder, in either reduced bills or increased comfort—a point reinforced by the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks). But we should not lose sight of the wider environmental reasons why energy efficiency is important.

Improved energy efficiency is a key element in our climate change programme. Under the United Nations climate change convention—signed by 153 countries at the Rio earth summit in 1992—the United Kingdom is committed to taking measures aimed at returning emissions of greenhouse gases to their 1990 levels by the year 2000. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South referred to the possibility of tougher targets, and cited Denmark and Germany. He seems conveniently to forget that those countries, along with others, have VAT on fuel.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister really believe that VAT on fuel in those countries has had a significant effect on energy conservation? What evidence can he show that the 8 per cent. put on fuel in April has dramatically improved energy efficiency in this country?

Mr. Jones: I can do no better than quote Friends of the Earth's Budget briefing:

"Increasing the price of domestic fuel is an important signal to householders that energy use should be cut. Cutting energy use is vital to reduce Britain's production of the greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, and other energy-related pollutants. Friends of the Earth therefore welcomes the Chancellor's commitment to increasing domestic fuel and power prices over the next two years through the gradual imposition of VAT."

[Mr. Jones]

Obviously it is impossible to predict people's precise behavioural response, but prices must affect their decisions. Although many other aspects of the matter, including knowledge, are important, that is a key ingredient.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is it not also important to realise that energy prices have been falling, and that the application of 8 per cent. of VAT merely offsets real falls that have already taken place? If we do not want people to become lax and casual about energy use, is it not right to maintain a sensible price?

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that various factors affect people's behaviour, which is why it is so difficult to quantify the precise effect of a single ingredient.

The United Kingdom climate change programme, published in January 1994, sets out in full how the United Kingdom will do this for each of the main greenhouse gases. The centrepiece of the programme is the set of measures to limit carbon dioxide emissions, the most significant greenhouse gas, by achieving savings equivalent to 10 million tonnes of carbon.

The carbon dioxide programme is based on a partnership approach—the Government provide the framework, and business, voluntary consumer and environmental groups, and local government all have a part to play. The programme includes a balanced package of cost-effective measures to encourage a more efficient use of energy across all sectors of the economy.

We are currently reviewing the contributions expected from those measures in the light of recent developments, some of which have just been referred to, and will also take account of the revised energy projections on which the Department of Trade and Industry is working. Our monitoring shows that we are currently on course to meet our commitments, and we will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that we fulfil our commitments under the climate change convention. In addition, we shall have to consider the position beyond the end of the present target period.

Thus, while a change to low-energy light bulbs or installing improved loft insulation in our homes may seem small steps, they make an important contribution to achieving the wider objective. The Government's commitment in that area is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Britain is often the first nation to demonstrate how we plan to tackle environmental initiatives. The United Kingdom was the first country in the world to present a programme under the UN climate change convention. We also played a leading role in the international negotiations under the climate change convention.

There are many players in the energy efficiency sector. Within central Government, the focus for activity is the Energy Efficiency Office of my Department. There has been a substantial increase in its budget—to more than £100 million in 1994-95. In 1995-96, that will increase to about £135 million—an increase of almost 28 per cent. over the original budget for 1994-95. Its mission is no less than the achievement of a culture change in all sectors. To achieve that, it uses a wide variety of measures, including: publicity to raise awareness; dialogue with industry and consumers; technical advice to overcome barriers to action; financial and other incentives where funds are unavailable; the stimulation of innovation and new technology; and legislation and regulation where that is necessary.

The Energy Efficiency Office does, of course, offer programmes that go much wider than the domestic sector and housing. In the industry, commerce and business sectors it provides advice and guidance to help overcome any barriers to action and to enable people to take informed decisions on how to invest in energy efficiency.

The best practice programme, with a budget in the current year of £17 million, provides authoritative advice and information on improving energy efficiency. Energy consumption guides show users of energy how they compare with others in their sector. Good practice guides and case studies show what can be done in real situations. There is also support towards research and development.

The programme, which began in 1989, aims to generate savings worth £800 million per annum and CO_2 savings of 5 million tonnes a year by 2000. By 1994, it had achieved savings of £300 million and 2 million tonnes of carbon per year. Its target audience includes decision makers and their professional advisers in industry, commerce, buildings and the public sector. It has generated more than 50,000 inquiries, produced nearly 1,200 publications, and organised more than 900 events.

The programme is backed by a network of 11 regional energy efficiency offices, which promote good environmental management and energy efficiency measures across the United Kingdom. The staff of those offices make about 2,500 visits each year to advise organisations on good environmental management and the benefit of implementing energy efficiency measures.

A commitment to energy efficiency by top management in the private and public sectors is being developed through the "making a corporate commitment" campaign. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) said that at least one of his local councils had made that commitment. About 1,800 organisations are now signatories. They agree to develop or reassess their energy management strategy; give board-level responsibility—if that is appropriate, as in the private sector—for taking the strategy forward; set performance targets and monitor and evaluate their performance; motivate staff; and ensure regular consideration of plans at board level.

The campaign is producing results and helping to raise the profile of energy efficiency and provide a focus for action. More than 260 local authorities have already signed up to the campaign. It is hoped that this commitment will help to facilitate energy conservation by tenants.

The Government are also aiming to set an example in their own estate.

Mr. Bennett: Although all those Government measures are welcome, will the Minister confirm that, in evidence to the Select Committee on the Environment, the Department made it clear that the main thrust of Government effort would be through the Energy Saving Trust? How will that be financed?

Mr. Jones: As I said a moment ago, we are reviewing progress towards the targets and the way in which events have changed. All sorts of different factors are at work,

including the change in VAT. The role and the financing of the Energy Saving Trust are extremely important. They must be considered in the context of those different factors and, as I said earlier, what happens to Ofgas.

The Government have set an example in their own estate. They have set themselves a challenging target of improving energy efficiency by 15 per cent. over the five years ending in March 1996, and will be setting targets beyond that.

I am sure that all hon. Members share my delight at learning that the Palace of Westminster is itself setting an example by installing new high energy efficiency lamps behind the faces of the clock. That represents some advance from the original Victorian gas lamps. I congratulate those responsible on the Accommodation and Works Committee and the Director of Parliamentary Works and his staff.

Mrs. Maddock: I am glad that the Minister has congratulated those responsible. Those energy conservation lamps were switched on last night, which is nice when one considers what we are discussing today.

Mr. Jones: There is still a lot to do. We only need to go around the building to realise that it is often either too hot or too cold. The Bill, however, is about energy efficiency in homes.

Mr. Jenkin: According to the Bill, would the Palace of Westminster constitute an energy conservation authority, given that there are some tenants in the building?

Mr. Jones: The Palace would be in the same position as a number of other buildings in which people live. The proper authorities would have to take them into account in their strategies. I hope that it would not be necessary for others to push us too hard. I speak as an ordinary Member of the House, as opposed to a Minister, when I say that I hope that we will do more and more to make the House an efficient place in which to work or to live. If a combined heat and power scheme was proposed for the House, I hope that it would be seized, as it is a key ingredient of energy efficiency. I hope that those who are responsible will listen to that message.

One of the main challenges in the housing sector is improving awareness of what the individual householder can do to reduce his fuel bills or improve his comfort levels and so protect the environment. The current "Wasting energy costs the earth" initiative is part of our campaign to educate householders on the link between energy use in the home and the threat of climate change, and the cost-effective use of energy. More importantly, it is aimed at bringing about changes in behaviour. Hon. Members may have seen the television commercials featuring the dinosaurs Ron, Brenda and Billy and their draughty home. A Dino Dome roadshow featuring the same characters and messages is touring the country.

As part of that initiative, the Government have produced a pack for children, which helps them to understand the link between the efficient use of energy, CO_2 emissions and the threat of climate change. The pack also contains useful information on energy saving around the home. Children are, as many hon. Members will acknowledge, particularly concerned about environmental issues, and can often spur their elders into action—although their concern sometimes outstrips their ability to remember to turn lights off.

The hon. Member for Christchurch mentioned Newark and Sherwood. It is interesting to note that young children were used to carry out the energy audit there. Such initiatives not only make the audit more cost-effective but involve the future generation. Little Jenny or Johnny quite likes going up into the loft to measure with a ruler the thickness of insulation or whatever. We should try to encourage such involvement.

The campaign we have launched emphasises that the average household can reduce energy consumption by 20 per cent. by taking a few simple and inexpensive measures. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish spoke about those who could not afford to take such measures. Quite a few can be taken at no cost, at little cost or at costs applied through the taxpayer through the home energy efficiency scheme.

The other day, after dark, I was travelling back through east London. I noticed that many homes had not got their curtains drawn in either living rooms or bedrooms. That is absurd, because it just lets heat escape for no good reason. People must learn to think about such heat loss.

Changes in behaviour can include draught-proofing; low-energy light bulbs; loft insulation, and others. Average CO_2 emissions can be reduced by between 1 tonne and 6.5 tonnes each year, and savings of up to £100 made on fuel bills.

I welcome what hon. Members on both sides of the House have said about the home energy efficiency scheme. It is a high-quality scheme which provides advice and grants for basic energy efficiency measures for householders over 60 years old, householders receiving income-related benefits and householders receiving disability living allowance. It is administered by the Energy Action Grants Agency on behalf of the Government.

With effect from 1 April 1995, the HEES budget will be increased to more than £100 million—a 45 per cent. increase on the figure for 1994-95. That money will provide grants for almost 600,000 households per year. Among its many benefits, HEES helps to improve comfort and reduce fuel bills of recipients, save energy and improve the housing stock. More than 1 million homes have been treated since the scheme began in 1991—not a few hundred thousand, as the hon. Member for Christchurch said. That does not include those who have benefited from other ways of supporting energy conservation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) spoke about that in his speech, and I suspect that his allusions were drawn from his experience of visiting one of the installations in his constituency. I welcome the fact that all hon. Members are being involved in that process, because it emphasises the importance of not only the ends but what the HEES installers do, and their helpfulness and efficiency.

Mr. Bennett: If the Minister estimates that 1 million homes have been improved in that way, will he tell us how many more homes he expects will need to be treated? Would it not be reasonable to try to speed that

[Mr. Bennett]

programme, welcome as the money is? There is a big advantage in those homes being treated this year rather than next year or the year after.

Mr. Jones: I thought that the thrust of the hon. Lady's Bill was that we did not know that, and that we needed to know it to plan. That no doubt is why the hon. Gentleman will vote for it.

On local authority housing stock, housing authorities are expected to incorporate energy efficiency practices and programmes fully into the housing investment programme process. A council's performance in that respect is one of the key factors considered in determining the way in which resources are allocated. That provides a clear incentive to local authorities to have a well-thought-out policy and programme, and to show in their housing strategies that energy efficiency measures are an integral part of their housing programmes.

Although, no doubt, many local authorities have gone down the road that they have as a result of their own commitments and interest in the subject, I cannot help thinking that the use of that incentive scheme by the Government is a reason why many more have done so. I believe that that is the key.

Even if the hon. Lady's Bill reached the statute book, there would be a gap between now and the time when that happened, just as there has been a gap since the date when the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed introduced his Bill. The Government will press on with their own initiatives to get things moving, because we recognise, as does the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, that we do not want time to be lost.

The green house demonstration programme, with about £60 million of funding during its three-year life, established a network of more than 180 replicable energy efficiency demonstration schemes to encourage local authorities to develop and apply energy efficiency strategies to their housing. Consolidated guidance on energy efficiency in council housing issued in June 1994 provides authorities with practical advice on developing effective energy efficiency policies and programmes.

The process also ensures that the Department is well informed about energy efficiency strategies, although no doubt one of the consequences of the reports that are incorporated in the hon. Lady's Bill is that we would receive even more information and I would not have to chase up local authorities quite so much.

Mrs. Maddock: The Minister is discussing where we should put our resources. As he spoke, it occurred to me that the significant advantage of our proposals in the Bill is that they differ from the green house programme, in which, previously, money was given to local authorities that were extremely keen, and perhaps had already gathered the knowledge, although the need might have been greater in many other places. Will the Minister consider that fact when he helps to draw up timetables, so that some of the green house money will go not simply to where local authorities are keen, but to where the need is?

Mr. Jones: That is why we took the steps that we did with the HIP strategy, and why I have probed local authorities when I have done my share of the rounds talking to them about their strategies. It is also, if I may say so, why I have decided that the Department should hold a seminar for the chairmen and chief officers of the relevant departments of the local authorities that are not perhaps as aware of the need to learn from the best practice of others. A great deal of sharing can take place, and I should like to build on that.

In addition to what the green house demonstration programme has achieved, the building research energy conservation unit, in association with the private sector, has held 40 seminars throughout the country in the past 18 months, called "Energy Efficiency Training for Housing Professionals", to provide general energy efficiency advice and guidance for local authority staff. Further seminars are planned, as are similar events for housing action trusts and housing associations. I pay tribute to the performance of housing associations, which has been impressive.

In April last year, we amended one of the rules about local authorities' entitlement to housing revenue account subsidy in a way that should help encourage energy efficiency measures. Local authorities should no longer lose housing subsidy when giving tenants choice about improvements and services. Under the modular improvements rule, tenants can be offered improvement schemes which are offered to tenants in return for an increase in rent; we encourage councils to offer energy efficiency improvements in that way.

Householders in the private sector may need financial help to take energy efficiency measures. Our guidance encourages authorities to consider the use of house renovation grant resources for energy efficiency works as part of an overall strategy. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) kindly expressed his appreciation for what my Department has made available in additional resources for the renovation strategy in Eastbourne—about £900,000. My hon. Friend badgers the Department constantly on behalf of his local authority, and I have no doubt that those whose conditions are improved as a result will be grateful to him.

House renovation grants enable authorities to help low-income households with the cost of repairs and improvements, including energy efficiency. Minor works assistance can also be given, to provide or improve thermal insulation for those on various income-related benefits.

As well as ensuring that the existing housing stock is made more energy-efficient, it is important that newly built accommodation is designed and constructed with energy efficiency in mind. New building regulations for England and Wales come into force later this year, with the aim of conserving energy. The new regulations will include a requirement for all new dwellings to obtain a standard assessment procedure rating.

The SAP is the Government's home energy rating system, which gives householders valuable information about the energy efficiency of their property. Builders will be required to notify local authorities of the energy rating of each new dwelling that they construct, whether they are new buildings or obtained by the conversion of existing buildings.

The revised requirements for conservation of fuel and power will improve the energy efficiency in new buildings of all types by between 25 and 35 per cent., compared with similar buildings built to comply with current requirements. It is estimated that the improvement

will lead to cumulative savings of a quarter of a million tonnes of carbon a year in the year 2000, progressively saving more thereafter.

Combined heat and power, which I referred to earlier, is the process that uses heat normally wasted to the atmosphere, and it is an integral part of the Government's energy efficiency and environmental strategy. As part of the climate change programme, we increased our already demanding target to 5,000 MW of installed capacity by the year 2000. At present, we have about 3,000 MW, and are making good progress. Several local authorities use CHP in their district heating schemes. For example, I am aware of CHP-based district heating schemes in Waltham Forest, Nottingham, Southampton, Stockton on Tees, North Avon and Bristol, to name but a few.

Other agencies have an important role to play in promoting energy efficiency in the home—not least local authorities, about which I shall say more later. There are aspects in which the European Union is involved, especially in relation to the labelling of products to indicate those that are less harmful to the environment. The ecolabelling scheme identifies products that are less harmful to the environment than equivalent brands and encourages the design, production and use of such products to achieve real environmental gain.

Mr. Bennett: Slowly.

Mr. Jones: Slowly.

The United Kingdom is developing product criteria in consultation with relevant groups, and some have been adopted already. The UK plays a leading role in the development of that scheme, and I think that it would be faster if other countries were to follow our lead.

This month, the United Kindom implemented a European Union directive covering energy labelling of domestic fridges and freezers, some of the heaviest consumers of energy in the home. The directive requires that energy information labels should be fixed to such appliances offered for sale. Consumers will therefore in future have access to information on which appliances are most energy efficient.

Efficient new appliances can save more than 40 per cent. of energy use. Since domestic electrical appliances account for about 20 per cent. of total electricity consumption in the UK, that will make a significant contribution to the UK's carbon dioxide reduction targets. Similar directives covering washing machines and tumble driers are expected to come into force on 1 January 1996. Manufacturers and retailers are already responding to those measures by developing and marketing products that use less energy to do the same job.

Standards for the efficiency of new central heating boilers and on mandatory labelling of domestic appliances have been agreed in the European Community and already have been adopted by the UK. The UK is also fully supportive of the EC's energy efficiency programme—SAVE.

As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said, mortgage lenders have a key role to play in relation to the private housing market. I have described how our housing investment programme process helps to ensure that authorities take full account in their housing investment decisions of the need to improve the energy efficiency of their own housing.

We want private householders, too, to make their homes more energy-efficient—important momentum can be generated by taking a close interest in energy efficiency when a property changes hands. We are working closely with the mortgage lenders to encourage them to incorporate home energy ratings in their survey reports and to offer green loans or other financial services to improve energy efficiency. That will provide house buyers with valuable information. One building society is already doing that on a full basis, and another is doing so on a pilot basis.

The Bill rightly focuses on the role of the local authority. It can do a great deal, both as a housing authority and as a body with means and opportunities to disseminate information to residents in its area. Central and local government are working closely, through the Central and Local Government Environment Forum, and its related energy efficiency working group, to carry forward an energy efficiency initiative in local government.

The local authority associations endorsed a target of reducing energy consumption in their members' non-housing buildings by 15 per cent. over a five-year period, demonstrating local government's commitment to energy efficiency. According to what the hon. Member for Nottingham, South said, it seems that some local authorities have set even more demanding targets.

A recent survey of all local authorities revealed that much is being done. Just over a third of all authorities responded. Some 64 per cent. of the authorities in the sample had an energy manager and almost the same number had integrated energy efficiency fully incorporated into their management structure. The indications were that 90 per cent. of the sample would soon have a formal corporate energy plan.

The authorities can also pull together thinking in their districts—co-ordinating with industry, schools, further education establishments, commerce and householders—and galvanise local action. Many have shown that that can be undertaken within existing budgets, without the need for additional resources or powers. I outlined some of the imaginative ways in which local authorities are approaching energy efficiency in my speech in the House on 1 November last year.

On that occasion, I mentioned the highly commendable performance of Dacorum borough council, part of which is in my constituency. If I may be forgiven for praising what is going on in my own area again, I should mention that the authority has integrated energy efficiency into its housing strategy and has long-term strategic energy efficiency aims, objectives and targets—not least of which is the plan to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from the council's stock by at least 1 tonne per dwelling per year by 1998. The strategy is well founded and appropriate, and clearly the same sort of thinking informs the Forest Heath and Bury St. Edmunds councils.

Let me inform the House of a few more authorities that are tackling energy efficiency—a few out of a large number. Islington London borough has profiled its stock and aims to bring all stock up to the standard of the current building regulations by 2002.

Cambridgeshire county council is running a "switch-on to energy savers" campaign until the end of this month. The campaign is in partnership with its schools and Eastern Electricity, to provide energy-saving light bulbs to parents at a discounted price.

[Mr. Jones]

Woodspring district council is one of the increasing number of local authorities that have completed a 100 per cent. audit of their housing stock. Energy efficiency is incorporated in a five-year programme with quantifiable targets.

I have already mentioned the trend for authorities to take fuller account of energy efficiency in their housing strategies. On the wider front, they have a duty under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to consider annually housing conditions in their districts. Departmental guidance published last November gives authorities advice and a detailed survey methodology to enable them to undertake local house condition surveys in the course of discharging that duty.

Mr. Jenkin: The authorities that my hon. Friend describes are obviously model authorities in terms of energy conservation. Would the Bill require them to carry out extra duties, or would their existing activities meet the Bill's requirements?

Mr. Jones: I suspect that, other than producing a specific report, the best local authorities will be able to continue very much as they are. That was the point that I made when I spoke in the earlier debate. But some local authorities are not so good, and the Bill codifies what we were doing using other methods. Sometimes, the House prefers to do that by legislation rather than by exerting Government pressure—today's debate recognises that. We have given the local councils guidance on that methodology.

Collecting information on heating and energy forms an integral part of the survey methodology. Our current research into the fitness standard introduced by the 1989 Act includes a study of minimum energy efficiency standards, and we shall be appraising the findings carefully. I hope that that account of the many initiatives which are already in hand in energy efficiency confirms the Government's commitment.

The hon. Member for Christchurch would, I think, be surprised if I were to say that the Government were entirely content with all the Bill's provisions—I certainly cannot surprise the hon. Lady in that sense. But I am happy to acknowledge that she has addressed many of the concerns that we expressed about last Session's Bill. I will not pretend that, if the House gives the Bill a Second Reading, the Committee stage will be entirely free of Government amendments, but I will give the hon. Lady and the House an assurance that the Government's approach will be constructive, and their aim will be to make it a better Bill.

Northern Ireland was mentioned. I want to make it clear that I have no objection in principle to the Bill being applied to Northern Ireland, but there are various ways of doing that. Perhaps the hon. Lady would like to give that matter some thought before Committee stage. I would be happy to continue the helpful discussions on the Bill that I had with the hon. Lady in the period before the Bill was published. Those discussions have, I think, resulted in a greater understanding on both sides.

The general principles that will guide us in considering amendments to the Bill will, I think, be readily understood by the House. We will want to ensure that any new duties placed on local authorities by the Bill are the minimum necessary to achieve its aims. We will want, too, to ensure that local and central Government are able to build to the maximum extent possible on existing procedures and information in complying with the Bill's provisions, in order to avoid unnecessary extra costs.

We regard it as important that the Bill's purpose should be to provide a tool to help central and local government in decisions on the application of existing resources, and thus to secure the maximum value for money in terms of energy efficiency. I do not think that any of those principles will cause the hon. Lady and the House any difficulties. They will form the basis of the Government's approach to the Bill in Committee.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister confirm that, not only is he giving the Bill his support today, but he is encouraging the Whips to ensure that the Bill is allowed to make progress at 2.30 pm?

Mr. Jones: I am speaking on behalf of the Government and, as far as I know, my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Patronage Secretary's Office are members of the Government.

I congratulate the hon. Lady again on her Bill, and wish her well in piloting it through the waters that lie ahead. No doubt I shall be with her in one of the lifeboats bobbing around on the waters. I look forward to our continuing relationship in discussions on a Bill on an extremely important subject, which was for many years neglected, at a cost to our environment and to those who live in draughty and energy-inefficient homes. If we can do something to improve those conditions, it will be a good thing.

12.18 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): When I spoke in the debate on the Energy Conservation Bill on 1 November, I concluded with the words:

"if the Government do not change their attitude and should the opportunity arise through success in private Members' ballots, someone on the Opposition side . . . will be back to press the Government again and again on this vital issue of energy conservation in people's homes."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1994; Vol. 248, c. 1384.]

It was hardly a prediction that needed a crystal ball. The Bill, which was introduced by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), enjoyed all-party support—indeed, the support of 400 right hon. and hon. Members—yet it was talked out by the Government and, ultimately, deplored by the Minister, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), who has just spoken.

Such deplorable behaviour could not go unchallenged. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), having won the No. 1 place in the ballot for private Members' Bills, should have brought a very similar Bill—the Home Energy Conservation Bill—to the House. She does so with the support of an even wider range of people, and there is tremendous determination, on these Benches at least, to see that the will of the House is not again thwarted by a mean-spirited and short-sighted Government.

In that context, I congratulate hon. Members on both sides of the House on their sponsorship of the Bill. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), who has not only sponsored this Bill but introduced his own Bill—the Energy-Saving Materials (Rate of Value Added Tax)

Bill—which we will debate next. I note that the Minister failed to answer the question about the Government's attitude to that Bill. I ask him whether he will take the opportunity to do that now, as he failed to do so in his winding-up speech. It is clear to the House that he refuses to do so and, as I continue my remarks, it will become clear why that is so.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State for the Environment told the nation about the pivotal role that local authorities could play in monitoring air pollution. Earlier in the week, he issued guidance about sustainable development. The Government are getting very good at the jargon but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said so eloquently today, they still cannot work out the economics. They are keen on monitoring—but only so far. They are less keen on taking remedial action, particularly if it costs money.

The Government cannot have it both ways. Environmental protection and energy conservation require the expenditure of money. It is called "investment", but it pays—sometimes quite quickly, always in the long term. In the case of this Bill, initial expenditure is expected to pay dividends not only in enabling people to keep warm at home but in reducing fuel bills, in conserving energy and by contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Ministers would have us believe that they share every one of those objectives, but their problem is that they have no strategic view. They have systematically squandered our national energy resources, made every aspect of energy efficiency more difficult by privatising the utilities, failed to place appropriate energy conservation duties upon the regulators and, as a number of my hon. Friends have pointed out, produced a complete fiasco in the Energy Saving Trust.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Will the hon. Lady tell the House whether a future Labour Government will therefore renationalise the power utility companies?

Ms Ruddock: We will certainly deal with the question of regulation in the interests of the consumers and we will ensure that the regulators are not able to frustrate the will of Government in terms of the Energy Saving Trust.

Mr. Jenkin: If that is the case, the hon. Lady should withdraw the charge that she made about the effect of privatisation, because the ownership of utility companies is clearly not the issue. She may wish to discuss other aspects of energy conservation and the utility companies, but ownership is not the issue.

Ms Ruddock: Ownership has produced a different environment in which it has become extremely difficult to have meaningful energy conservation. The utilities have been placed in competition with each other, to the detriment of consumers and the environment. I do not concede in any sense to the hon. Gentleman on that point. The Labour party in government will ensure that our energy suppliers, our energy regulators and our consumers get a far better deal, through Government intervention, than they have received under this Government.

Mr. Jenkin: The onus is on the hon. Lady to be specific. What measures is she talking about?

Ms Ruddock: I have been absolutely specific: I am talking about energy conservation and the ability to raise money for that purpose, which is the purpose that the Government had in mind when they established the Energy Saving Trust. The Government proposed that the privatised utilities should themselves contribute towards the Energy Saving Trust. The regulators have refused to do so on their behalf. That is totally unacceptable and it has made complete nonsense of the sops that the Government gave to the country and the consumers when they went ahead with privatisation.

The Minister was clearly unable to answer the very pertinent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish about the contribution to energy conservation made by charging value added tax. Energy efficiency strategies are useless if they are incapable of being measured. The Government have failed to show how their strategy of imposing VAT on fuel has produced meaningful results.

The Bill will not suffer from that weakness. It offers the Government a real opportunity. Its merits have been described with great clarity by the hon. Member for Christchurch, and I congratulate her on the skill with which she redrafted the measures in an attempt to gain Government support. We would have preferred duties rather than powers, but we accept that the Bill offers great scope to those local authorities that seriously seek to further energy conservation.

The Labour party wholeheartedly supports the hon. Lady's efforts. In 1991, our policy document, "Green Households", made similar proposals and in our major environment document, "In Trust for Tomorrow", we propose a national programme of energy efficiency works.

Labour councils up and down the land have done pioneering work and have demonstrated the gains that could be made by implementing the measures laid down in the Bill. Those gains would not only be immediate for the householder but include the long-term improvement of housing stock and the creation of much-needed jobs.

My local authority, the London borough of Lewisham, has undertaken an energy audit of its housing stock. It has used housing investment programme moneys to undertake the insulation of older housing stock and it has surveyed public buildings under its ownership to identify the scope for energy-saving measures; yet, in common with so many other willing and progressive authorities, it finds itself short of the necessary funds.

Thousands of my constituents are cold this winter. Many of them are elderly, are in poor health or are the parents of young children. Frankly, I am sickened and angry when they come to my surgeries— sickened because I can feel their misery, and angry because they are asking for so little, yet they cannot get the help that they need. We have heard again today that the Government are proud of their various schemes and of how many households could benefit, but the reality on the ground often seems somewhat different.

In mid-December, I had cause to write to the Secretary of State about the home energy efficiency scheme after an elderly constituent with a sick husband tried to obtain help. She was told that no money was left and that she would have to wait until more became available in the spring—after the cold weather had passed. The Minister with responsibility for energy efficiency replied four weeks later, saying that he was sorry about my constituent's disappointment. He added:

"This does not mean that the scheme is underfunded. It is, however, in the nature of cash limited schemes that only a limited number of grants can be paid out of the available budgets."

[Ms Ruddock]

I respectfully suggest that the budget was too small. I cannot think of any everyday misery greater than being old and cold, yet we may be sure that people are still dying of cold in this country, millions suffer damp and mouldy homes, and even more millions of households cannot heat a single room to modern standards. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) did well to remind the House of the shocking statistics for hypothermia deaths, which are a national disgrace.

Let me turn to some more examples, although I endorse much that was said by the Minister about the progress that has been made. Many local authorities have done their best to raise energy efficiency standards. Kirklees metropolitan council established a project in 1993 to examine energy efficiency and the type of programme needed. The resulting affordable warmth and energy efficiency strategy provides concrete evidence of the caring and imaginative work that can be done by local authorities. The strategy's aim is to enable tenants to reduce fuel bills to a more affordable level by providing a programme of insulation, ventilation and heating combined with education and advice. All Kirklees council homes are currently being energy rated with a view to targeting investment at the least energy-efficient buildings. The advice service is available to all residents. A pilot survey of private sector housing has also been undertaken and more work is planned.

That record begs the question that was often asked by Conservative Members in last November's debate. If councils have such comprehensive strategies and considerable success, why is such a Bill required? The answer is that Kirklees and Lewisham are among the best authorities. We must place new demands on the worst, and we should impose on all housing authorities a duty to assess the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in their ownership and to take reasonable steps to assess potential energy savings in all other residential accommodation in their areas.

The Bill provides for just that—a national strategy, locally implemented, that could bring affordable warmth to all our people. It would also raise consciousness of energy conservation, reduce domestic energy bills and contribute to the vital task of reducing greenhouse gases. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch on her success to date, and I wish her well and the Bill a speedy and successful passage in Committee.

12.32 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on her success in the ballot. There is consensus throughout the House on the Bill's general aims. I represent a rural constituency in the north-west which, although it is beautiful, suffers at times from bitterly severe weather. My constituency, more than most, would benefit from the Bill becoming law.

I have received many letters from not only constituents but parish councils, which have held meetings about the subject, and local authorities in Ribble valley. They are all delighted to see the Bill come before the House. It renews the attempt to require local authorities to draw up energy conservation plans for residential properties. The Bill aims to make provision for the drawing up of energy conservation plans and priorities in the UK to secure the more efficient and effective use of natural resources. It also aims to give the Secretary of State for the Environment powers to set timetables for such plans and works arising from them, and for other related purposes. As I said, the Bill has cross-party support.

I support the main tenets of the Bill, which include giving every energy conservation authority the duty to

"assess the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in its ownership;"

and to

"take reasonable steps to assess or estimate the potential for improvement in the energy efficiency of other residential accommodation in its area."

Each energy conservation authority then has the onus to investigate ways of reducing consumption—the target is a 30 per cent. reduction— and to publish a report on that. It is an ambitious target, and it is something that we have to aim for.

The other main tenet of the Bill is that the energy conservation authority must regularly check the atmosphere for emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide, and assess ways of decreasing those levels. That is also vital. The Bill demands that there be regular liaison between the energy conservation authorities and the Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Christchurch has been gracious in stating that the Government have already been active on the issue. On 25 January last year, the United Kingdom became the first country to respond to the convention on climate change that was signed at the Rio summit in June 1992. The UK published "Climate Change: The UK Programme", which set out the contribution that central and local government, business, industry and individuals will make to achieve the reduction in the UK's greenhouse gas emissions.

The programme set out a detailed package of measures and energy saving targets for central and local government and other public bodies. It also strengthens the Energy Efficiency Office's programme of advice and information, to which I shall return in a moment.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that the whole point about the Government's approach to the matter is that their targets are realistic and sensible? It is all very well being critical about targets that cannot ever be reached. The whole point about the Government's targets is that they are achievable. There is no point in having a fantasy of what is achievable, and that it is why the targets and achievements as set out by the Government are so sensible.

Mr. Evans: The Government's approach to the matter has been consistent. We have been working towards those targets for a long time, and we shall be working towards them for a long time in the future. I do not believe that we shall ever be able to relax about energy conservation. As we go into the future, it will be more important that we look at fresh measures, such as new technology and the contribution that it can make to energy conservation. We desperately need to do that.

Another aspect of the programme is the commitment to further increases in fuel duties, which we have seen in several Budgets. I should like to sound a cautionary note about that. I represent a rural constituency, and one must always take note of the need that people who live in rural areas have for their transportation and cars. I hope that

that will be taken on board in future Budgets, and that assistance can be given to people who desperately need their vehicles in rural areas.

We have heard about the imposition of VAT on fuel during the debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) made a pertinent point about the matter. I do not believe that everybody in the debate has been consistent in his or her approach, and I refer in particular to the Labour party. Labour Members have been happy to criticise the introduction of VAT on fuel while arguing for tougher environmental targets.

The Labour party criticised the Government for dragging their feet on global warming during the Rio summit. The Opposition environment spokesman at that time—the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)—said that more could have been achieved, and that British Ministers could have played a more positive role, particularly in respect of global warming. As ever, the Labour party has failed to make it clear how it would hope to meet such targets. The cynicism behind Labour's approach is transparent.

Ms Ruddock: There is no inconsistency in what I have said or in what my predecessors have said on those matters. We have always opposed the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel. We maintain that it is possible to do more and to do so more quickly while having rigorous standards. I shall be happy to send the hon. Gentleman the Labour party document entitled "In Trust for Tomorrow", which sets out clearly a sustainable energy policy within the context of sustainable growth, and demonstrates the ways in which that can be achieved. There is no weakness on Opposition Benches in putting forward specific proposals. The weakness is on the Government side of the Chamber. Ministers have failed to demonstrate how imposing VAT on fuel has led in any way to energy conservation.

Mr. Evans: I fully appreciate why the hon. Lady is so sensitive on the issue. I shall be more than delighted to receive any policy papers on that issue and any others that the Labour party might care to send me. We are desperate to hear what some of its policies may happen to be.

I shall continue with my speech and refer to some policy papers of the past, which tend to show that the Government put forward the introduction of VAT on fuel as an energy conservation measure, and that the Labour party wished also to conserve energy and had its own plans to impose VAT on energy had it assumed power.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Has my hon. Friend read this week's *New Statesman*? I accept that it is not such a good read as *The Spectator*. It contains information about the changes in some of the responsibilities within the Labour party. Would my hon. Friend encourage the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) to send a copy of the paper to which she referred to Mr. Alastair Campbell, who now appears to be in charge of policy in the Labour party, to see whether the Opposition spokesman on environmental protection can get back into the shadow Cabinet? The *New Statesman* pointed out that the position had been downgraded along with the Labour party's proposals for securing environmental improvements.

Mr. Evans: I am extremely grateful for the information that has been provided by my hon. Friend. After my speech, I shall rush to the Library to read the article in the *New Statesman* for myself. I am delighted to hear that somebody is in charge of Labour party policy, whether it be Alastair Campbell or anyone else.

The Labour party made it clear in its 1990 policy review document "Looking to the Future" that it planned to introduce VAT on fuel if it were elected. Under the heading "Value Added Tax", the Labour party explained:

"We will use . . . the tax system, as well as regulation, to help protect the environment. . . We will look at . . . ways of reducing taxes on environmentally safe products and increasing them on environmentally damaging products."

The document also stated that

"zero-rating on items such as food, fares, books and children's clothing should remain as an essential part of the VAT system."

There is no mention of domestic fuel in the document. Labour clearly intended to extend VAT as one of its green measures.

At exactly the same time, Labour Members of the European Parliament unequivocally called for the introduction of environmental taxes and "green VAT". I know what the Labour party leader's view is towards Labour MEPs at present; I am not too sure whether it was exactly the same in 1990. In their report, they stated:

"In promoting the environmental transformation of industry, we need to use every possible policy—environmental taxes and charges as well as regulations. There may, for instance, be scope for a 'green VAT' as part of the harmonisation of indirect taxes."

That passage appeared in a document entitled "The New Europe 1990."

When a Conservative Government subsequently decided to extend VAT to domestic fuel in line with other European countries, Labour was quick to condemn the move. Despite all that, Labour continued to support an energy tax in the European Parliament and in its consultation documents.

In 1993, Labour's MEPs signed a European socialist white paper, which stated that the Community must take a number of steps, including

"agreement on tough and binding targets for CO_2 emission reductions into the next century and a strategy for achieving them by means of the adoption of an energy tax."

I know that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) is keen to intervene to refute some of the allegations that I have made. I think that the House will be interested to hear what she has to say about what Labour's MEPs were saying and about the contents of Labour party policy documents.

Ms Ruddock: I think that I should send the hon. Gentleman masses of Labour party documents—he could keep coming to the House and quoting—then he would learn something about how a policy is made. We do make proposals. We do discuss them, then we come to policy. Nothing that he has said shows that we promised the party or the electorate at any time that we would impose VAT on fuel. The hon. Gentleman stood in the previous general election on the Prime Minister's promise that there would be no extension of VAT. I ask him to consider who is misleading the electorate.

Mr. Evans: The answer is quite clear from the statements that I have read out. I know that the Labour party discusses and debates as part of its policy programme. It is just the policy bit that we are waiting for. We await it with bated breath.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that although it is true that there are high levels of energy conservation

[Mr. Spring]

and insulation in Scandinavia—references were made to that by Opposition Members—the rate of VAT payable on domestic fuel there is one of the highest anywhere in the European Union?

Mr. Evans: Yes, it is and if ever the Labour party formed the next Government and signed up to many of the measures that come from Brussels and, perhaps, did away with the veto and made it far more difficult through qualified majority voting for us to object to any of them, we might well have to sign up, whether the Labour party liked it or not, to some of the VAT and taxation measures on energy.

Mr. Jenkin: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I remember discussing VAT and energy matters for many hours in the Chamber during the Maastricht debate. I do not think that we want to go over the whole of that again this morning. Perhaps we can get on to the Bill.

Mr. Evans: I shall endeavour to do that.

Having dealt with the Labour party, I now turn my attention to the Liberal Democrats. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch on introducing the measure, but the Liberal Democrats are very much in favour of a pan-European carbon tax. That might lead directly to the introduction of taxation on fuels. The Liberal Democrats and the Labour party seem to be at one on their attitude towards the European Community and signing up to everything that comes from Brussels.

The Government are committed to promoting energy efficiency, because it represents one of the quickest and most cost-effective ways in which to tackle the problem of global warming. Energy efficiency measures contribute more than half of all the savings set out in the UK programme to meet the climate change convention target. The budget of the Energy Efficiency Office for 1994-95, as has been stated, has increased to more than £100 million—a 50 per cent. increase on the 1993-94 budget; and it has increased seventeenfold since 1979.

My hon. Friend the Minister has already gone through many of the energy efficiency programmes that we have in place, including the Energy Efficiency Office's best practice programme, which has a budget of £17 million. It has achieved much since its inception. The Department of the Environment's advertising and promotion campaign, "Wasting energy costs the earth", has been superb. I believe that we should do far more to try to get across, through television campaigns, the waste that is caused when one does not pay sufficient attention to home insulation, and what individuals and families could do to help reduce that waste. When one considers that more than a quarter of all carbon dioxide produced in this country comes from energy used in the home, it shows how important that is. By taking a few simple energy efficiency measures at home, the average family could reduce its energy consumption, as the Minister stated, by 20 per cent. and into the bargain reduce its fuel bills by some £100.

I fully support the building regulations that come into force on 1 July this year, which include a requirement to provide energy ratings for new dwellings and a requirement for conservation of fuel and power. The Bill focuses on domestic housing and emphasises the important role of local authorities. I am proud to say that, in my constituency, both Ribble Valley and Preston borough councils, as well as all the Ribble Valley parish councils, are very much in favour of home energy conservation and are active in that area.

Ribble Valley borough council has been especially assiduous in taking advantage of the grants available and using them to improve the energy rating of its homes. The council is often mentioned by the Energy Efficiency Office as being one of the best examples of a council making full use of whatever is available to reduce energy waste. I commend any hon. Member interested in energy conservation to contact his local authorities to find out what they are doing.

I visited a council home in my area last year. At the time, it was being fitted with loft, tank, door and window insulation. My hon. Friend the Minister said that when he was driving around recently, he noticed houses where the curtains were open. So much energy is lost because of that. There is scope to provide more information, so that people become aware of the fact that, by taking simple measures, which cost nothing, they can reduce energy waste and save money.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There are many similar examples. People who go out in the evenings or away for weekends often leave their central heating and hot water systems on the same settings as they use when they are there. A little thought, preparation and the use of simple controls—at no cost—would save money and limit environmental damage. We must get across the message that people should first tackle no-cost measures, then low-cost measures and then, increasingly, those that require higher investment.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. As has been said, some young people are aware of environmental issues and what they can do to conserve energy and limit damage to the planet. However, we need more programmes to get that message across to other youngsters. My hon. Friend joked about youngsters leaving lights on throughout the house and suggested the simple measure of turning the light off when leaving a room. He also mentioned the energy efficiency gains from using the new bulbs that conserve energy. I know that they cost more than traditional bulbs, but the saving achieved will more than pay for that in the long term. I hope that people will be educated not to take short-term measures which appear to be cheap, but which in fact cost money in the long run.

Ribble Valley borough council has spent much of its grant for energy conservation on improving sheltered housing. It is vital that elderly people are kept warm. Many of the older generation are extremely careful with their money, but some of them overdo it. I have been into some of their homes where heating is restricted not just to one room, but to no room. I am fully conscious of the limited budgets within which many people have to operate, but I hope that more can be done to educate them about some of the simple measures, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Minister, that could be taken to keep their homes warm.

The council has used some of its own funds to ensure that more energy conservation measures are taken in its area. That practice should be encouraged because it results in large energy savings. My hon. Friend the Minister

mentioned a figure of 20 per cent.; my council has mentioned 17 per cent. It is obvious that more can be done.

The hon. Member for Christchurch mentioned a vital issue—that although some local authorities, such as mine, follow best practice, others do not. That is why we need the Bill. Some people would benefit greatly from taking energy conservation measures in their homes. They might be ignorant of the possibilities available or unable to afford to take essential and necessary measures in the short term. Therefore, we must ensure that money is targeted at those who are most in need. Some people who can afford energy conservation measures are already following best practice, but there are others in the community who need help. We ought to target our resources and attention to some of those people. That will cost more in the short term, but it could save money in future.

As a result of the Rio summit, we are committed to doing more to protect our environment. The time for procrastination is long gone: now is the time for action. We have reacted well to calls to control emissions of, for example, CO_2 and we must now work to deal with energy usage. No effort is required to say at a summit, "Yes, that is easy." That is rather like some of the things to which our European Union friends sign up and do not enact. We must take action.

I am delighted at the way in which the Bill differs from the one that was presented by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). Earlier in the debate I spoke about transparency, and I know that the hon. Member for Christchurch knew exactly what I was referring to. It is amazing that when a clipboard mentality comes into operation, people at all levels—not just local authorities but people at Westminster, in Whitehall and within the European Community—interpret a measure to suit their own ends. Therefore, I am delighted that the limitations placed by the Bill on local authority officers in trying to formulate proposals are quite transparent. The hon. Lady referred to such officers as the thermal thought police. That is a delightful description of what we feared they would become under the earlier Bill.

Employment possibilities have been mentioned, as has a figure of 500,000 jobs. We cannot put a figure on the number of jobs that will be created, but they would be spread throughout the country and would be created not just by local authorities but by many private firms that would become involved in conservation measures. Employment is a useful by-product of the Bill. We need the Bill and energy conservation. If it was just another measure to create employment, I would be rather dubious about it. I support it because it produces so much good; it is less prescriptive and far more flexible than the earlier one, and has gained support in all parts of the House.

I had hoped to hear more in the debate about Labour's policy. The hon. Member for Deptford has told me that her party has policies. But we do not quite know where they are. Perhaps, like some of the best laid plans or like Jaguar cars, people have forgotten where they put them. I hope that in speeches in the not too distant future, Labour will shed a little light on some of its policies, especially on energy conservation, because the country is waiting and listening. At the moment we hear nothing.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch on her Bill and I look forward to supporting it in all its stages.

12.57 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I shall speak briefly about the Bill and register my support and enthusiasm for it. I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), and I am pleased to be present on an occasion of such encouraging consensus. Some hon. Members have thought it necessary to elaborate on some issues and decorate the debate with a semblance of confrontation, but it would be out of keeping with the spirit of the House if the debate did not have a dose of that.

It is nice to see the Bill in its latest incarnation. I appreciate the way in which the political parties have in turn supported the Bill. I understand that the Liberal Democrats have supported it from the beginning and that, after some initial reticence and scepticism, Labour decided to embrace it with enthusiasm. Of course, the minority parties, as they are called, have been enthusiastic all along.

We must mention the Green party, without which the Bill would not have been devised or brought before the House, or attracted the backing that it has received. We should all appreciate the enormous input from that direction, and the general public also need to understand that.

I will not list the litany of organisations and agencies that have supported the Bill, as that has been done. There is every sign that the Government have also been convinced, which is most encouraging.

I do not need to rehearse the rationale for the Bill, either, as that was covered in the Library research paper. I congratulate the author, partly because the paper puts the matter in context so excellently. It mentions the need to reduce pollution, especially CO_2 emissions, to meet targets and to go well beyond them. There is no question about that—we must go well beyond stabilisation in 2000. We need policies that take us far beyond. The paper also mentions the need to reduce the rate of depletion of non-renewable resources, an aspect that we have not dealt with a great deal, which is also crucial.

We need to do all those things within the context of the relatively new concept of sustainable consumption. That is one of the buzz phrases that is part of the Rio process. I recommend to hon. Members a useful document that was produced by the Commission for Sustainable Development, following a seminar on sustainable consumption in Oslo in January 1994. The elaboration of what a sustainable pattern of consumption involves continues, and there is to be a further seminar in Norway on the subject.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman described the need to go much further with environmental targets and the reduction of damaging energy consumption. What is his view on nuclear power and the role that it can play in clean generation, rather than using the non-renewable resources that he clearly wishes to conserve?

Mr. Dafis: That is a path down which people will be increasingly invited to go in the years ahead, when we come face to face with the serious reality of how difficult it is to reduce CO_2 emissions. We have to find ways other than nuclear energy. We must modify and radically reconsider our patterns of industrial production and consumption—that is what sustainable consumption, which forms part of sustainable development, is about.

[Mr. Dafis]

We must certainly withstand the facile suggestion that nuclear energy is the answer because it does not produce pollution of the type that we have been discussing—sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and, in particular, CO_2. That suggestion is foolish.

We must recognise that, if we move properly towards sustainable consumption, and really understand and develop that idea, it will have far-reaching implications. We are really just at the beginning of the process. We also need to move towards sustainable consumption in a socially equitable way and one that will link environmental improvement with job creation, which is the next phase in the development of environmental policy.

I recommend the work of Friends of the Earth in its recent publication, "Working Future", which explores the idea that there is no contradiction or serious conflict between environmental protection and employment. On the contrary, there is an inter-relationship and interdependence which we need to recognise and on which we must base our economic policies. The recent launch of that volume was supported by the chairman of Cambridge Econometrics, Terry Barker. That new understanding comes from well-informed and sophisticated directions. We must do all that while emphasising the need to improve the quality of people's lives—their health, comfort and fuel costs. That is an extraordinarily attractive combination.

A great deal has been achieved. The Government have reached a state of acceptance but much has been achieved through the process of discussing the Bill and its predecessors since I introduced the first Energy Conservation Bill in 1993, simply because they have encouraged debate in this place. It has been good to see hon. Members who at first were not particularly engaged in the matter speak intelligently and in a well-informed way about this extremely important issue. We have clearly achieved a heightened awareness. It was good to have the Chancellor himself speak about the home energy efficiency scheme at a time of high drama not so long ago.

The argument has been won, so I do not need to go through the arguments that were expressed in opposition to previous Bills. Those, too, have been dealt with successfully, and modifications to the Bill have tried to cope with the fanciful objections raised by the Government.

The Bill is on exactly the right lines. Clearly, the process must be mandatory. It must be comprehensive and UK-wide, so that it benefits people everywhere, not just those who live in the territories of enlightened local authorities. Plans must be laid out, because we need cost-efficient, properly prioritised processes. The measures must apply to private housing, because, first, private landlords are among the worst culprits in terms of investing in energy efficiency; and, secondly, the majority of houses are owner-occupied, and many are energy-inefficient. The Bill has been modified to meet all those requirements.

Yesterday, the Department of the Environment published a document called "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge". After a brief glance at it, it seems reasonable to congratulate the Department on its approach. It shows how much the Bill is in keeping with the Government's approach. The document speaks about the need for a UK-wide action plan; a crucial role for local authorities; the need to give powers and place obligations on local authorities in devising those plans; the need to prepare plans for remedying air quality problems; and target setting. It also recognises the resource implications and the fact that they need to be carefully costed, and says that that will be the subject of further consultation with local authority associations.

Thus, the Bill may have done more than raise the matter of energy conservation and efficiency. It may be a model for co-operation between central Government and local authorities in a process of local involvement that can apply in future to other action programmes that form part of an environmental, social and economic policy.

1.8 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): In following the hon. Member who has just spoken, I shall call his constituency simply Pembroke, North for fear of offending him and his constituents by mispronouncing his constituency's full name.

Mr. Dafis: The hon. Gentleman will seriously offend my constituents if he does not refer to Ceredigion. I shall not explain why.

Mr. Jenkin: I am extremely grateful that the hon. Gentleman has relieved me of that onerous task. Although I am proud to have a Welsh name and Welsh forebears, the Welsh tongue must have left my ancestors many years ago, as my family emigrated to York in the 14th century before settling in Kent in the 16th. I have therefore lost my Welsh roots.

I understand that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) speaks for the Green party. I was therefore most interested in his comments about low energy usage and the strategy to achieve that in the United Kingdom. It is encouraging that the Bill has such wide support, from the most capitalist organisations to some of the most socialist ones, including Friends of the Earth. It is cause for concern, however, that not all those organisations share the same practical enthusiasm for nuclear power. Following my intervention on the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North, it appears that he seems not to support it either.

It is difficult to imagine how any substantial savings to the atmosphere can be achieved unless it is through a process of substituting for environmentally damaging power generation that which causes less environmental damage. Nuclear power produces low levels of pollution, and what material is produced is in such small quantities that it can be safely and easily dealt with. It is a sad commentary on the impracticality of the hard core environmental lobby in the country that it does not yet support nuclear power.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that there is no other way of reducing environmental pollution, because one of the most important ways of doing so is by reducing demand for energy. That part of the process can be carried out by the Bill, just as other Government policies are intended to carry it out. The hon. Gentleman must also recognise that the principal source of anxiety about the nuclear power industry, apart from

its past tendency to expect huge increases in demand, stems not from its production of electricity, but from the unresolved problem of decommissioning.

Mr. Jenkin: I am not sure that the problem of decommissioning is unresolved. There are plenty of unresolved problems with every form of electricity generation, including the use of so-called "renewables", because the scale of activity required to take advantage of the wind, tides or waves damages the environment in different ways. I am opposed to a Severn barrage because of its effect on the area's ecosystem. I am also greatly concerned about the despoliation of the landscape and the disruption caused to migrating birds by huge wind farms in rural areas. We should remember that noise is another form of pollution, about which we should be equally concerned.

Nuclear power stations produce huge quantities of energy, occupy relatively small sites and produce virtually no pollution. What is even more encouraging is that it has now been proved that the life expectancy of nuclear power stations can be extended safely and effectively to produce cheap power.

Next door to my constituency is one of the old Magnox power stations, which is still functioning safely and producing nuclear energy at extremely low cost without any environmental impact that can be measured.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I invite my hon. Friend to visit my constituency to see the wind farm in the neighbouring constituency. It is not just the noise pollution from such farms which makes people rather reluctant to support that form of energy generation, but the fact that they are a blot on the landscape. I represent a beautiful constituency, and I assure my hon. Friend that I would strenuously fight any attempt to erect a farm of windmills in it.

Mr. Jenkin: There is, luckily, not a lot of wind in my constituency, except that from the Liberal Democrat-controlled town hall, which generates so much wind that I do not think any device could safely capture it without damaging the environment.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman make a public statement today, welcoming a nuclear power plant in his constituency?

Mr. Jenkin: I have welcomed Sizewell B, which is being built quite close to my constituency.

There is actually no proposal for such a nuclear power station in my constituency, but in answer to the hon. Gentleman, the same sort of objections apply to new factories, to new roads and to new shopping centres, but it has nothing especially to do with nuclear power. However, I wish to move on to the—

Mr. Smith *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman again, if he insists.

Mr. Smith: I do insist, and the question is a simple one, which I pose to the hon. Gentleman: will he make a public statement today, welcoming a nuclear power plant in his constituency? Will he please answer a simple question with a straightforward answer?

Mr. Jenkin: But there is no proposal for a nuclear power station in my constituency. There was a proposal for a gas-fired power station in my constituency, but I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I opposed that, because it was an inappropriate place, in my opinion and that of my constituents, in which to have it. In that respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman would be pushed to find anywhere in the country for a large industrial installation, whether it was nuclear or not, where it would be popular with the local people concerned. We all share that problem, because we all live in an industrial society. Whether the installation was nuclear has no relevance to the comments that he made.

I shall move on briefly to the other comments made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about achieving low energy consumption. The one thing that we have established in the past 20 years is that one can sustain economic growth without increasing energy consumption. That overturned an expectation in economics that had become almost a written fact.

The seminal document on that matter was written in the 1970s, by Professor Leach. It was called, "A Low-Energy Strategy for the UK". I think that there were two authors. If I recall correctly, they were supporters of the use of non-polluting and non-renewable energy generation in substitution for the use of renewable resources.

I join everyone in the House who has congratulated the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on coming top of the ballot and introducing the Bill. I must also apologise to her, and to the House, for being unable to be present for the first part of the debate, because there are great events afoot in my constituency, in the town of Brightlingsea, where there is huge public feeling against the transport of live animals.

Perhaps that has some relevance to today's debate about energy conservation, because it is extraordinary the way in which European Community law can influence people's behaviour, so that, instead of efficiently slaughtering animals in this country and shipping the carcases, which would surely be more energy efficient, we find ourselves, rather inefficiently, shipping live animals across the water to other parts of the European Community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That has very little to do with home energy, though.

Mr. Jenkin: I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was simply explaining why I have not been able to be present for the debate. There is huge public feeling on that matter in my constituency, and my constituents would wish to know that I had been giving my attention to that matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my hon. Friend might have been about to say that people who leave their homes to join demonstrations should ensure that they turn the heating down while they go to the protest.

Mr. Jenkin: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. He brings an original mind to every subject he approaches—never more evidenced than today.

The Bill and the Government's support for it reflect the support that the Government have given to the principle of energy conservation ever since being elected. That has been true more than ever since the Rio summit, when we set ourselves targets to reduce energy consumption and the generation of atmospherically damaging gases.

[Mr. Jenkin]

My hon. Friend the Minister said that the home produces 25 per cent. of the carbon dioxide produced in the United Kingdom. It is worth emphasising—perhaps it should be advertised more frequently—that energy conservation in the home is not just about saving money, but about improving comfort. If people realised that they would not only save money, but would be able to walk down to the kitchen in the morning to make an early morning cup of tea without piling on so many dressing gowns, they would be more inclined to conserve energy in the home. Ordinary people can obtain genuine benefits by pursuing energy conservation measures in the home.

I mentioned that the Palace of Westminster is a home. I often walk around it and wonder whether there is a low-energy strategy for the whole of the Palace. The hon. Member for Christchurch mentioned the new lighting system in the Clock Tower, which will be beneficial—I gather that it will save about £1,000 per year in energy consumption. But there are many areas of the Palace, which is our home, where further savings could be made.

How often have we been in parts of our home, the Palace, and found areas of it ludicrously hot, with the windows wide open in an attempt to disperse the heat as rapidly as possible? There are not enough thermostats on the radiators, and there are not enough thermostats controlling the heating systems. I urge the Palace authorities to do what they can to improve the system.

I have received much correspondence on home energy conservation from my constituents, who have almost universally urged me to support the principle. It gives me pleasure to be able to welcome the Bill, which has advantages over the previous Bill, not least that of flexibility. It is important not to place too big a burden on local authorities.

Opposition parties for ever complain that we have constantly added to the duties of local authorities and failed to fund them effectively. Here is a case where we are determined not to place unnecessary additional burdens on local authorities. My hon. Friend the Minister explained that a number of authorities in this country already pursue policies that the Bill would require them to adopt, so very few extra burdens would be imposed on those authorities. The Bill targets the recalcitrant and delinquent authorities, which should be an advantage.

It is perhaps a comment on public housing authorities that the Bill is needed. Good housing authorities should be implementing the provisions already. I am not making a party political point: I simply wish to emphasise that good public sector housing authorities have a duty to improve the lot of their tenants as best they can to save them money, improve their comfort and, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) said, save lives.

Those in the private sector also have a moral duty to take such action, but I do not think that it would be effective to legislate in the same way for private sector home owners.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My hon. Friend mentioned lighting. Does he believe that, when local authorities consider ways to save energy, they should not do so at the expense of security? So many of our car parks and other places in town centres have insufficient lighting for security purposes, particularly for ladies who are on their own.

I refer specifically to car parks because I know that some people are fearful of using them for this reason. Does my hon. Friend agree that the authorities could look at ways of introducing energy-efficient lighting in such places, as opposed to no lighting at all?

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. Residents in my constituency have complained to me that one part of the public housing stock is not adequately lighted. The council complains that it would cost a lot of money to light it adequately, but the use of low-wattage light bulbs and effective lighting design means that it can be achieved much more cheaply than the council perhaps expects.

The Minister suggested that there should be one or two amendments to the Bill, and I look forward to learning what they might be. One amendment that I recommend is that the definition of housing authorities should be widened to include the Church Commissioners, who have a large housing stock. I serve on the Social Security Select Committee which has been examining the Church Commissioners' conduct. It is incumbent upon Parliament to hold the Church Commissioners responsible for their activities to some degree, and perhaps that should apply to their activities in this area.

Earlier in the debate I exchanged ideas with the hon. Member for Deptford about the amount of money that is being spent on energy conservation. I think it is important that we do not regard the amount of money spent as some symbol of political correctness in energy conservation. There must be a limit to how much money can be spent effectively.

Although energy conservation measures may seem good in theory, in practice implementing them may cost more money than the measures would save. Construction, materials, transport and labour could use more energy than the measures would warrant. We must ensure that energy conservation measures are practical, not just ideological.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Does not my hon. Friend agree that it is also important to avoid confusion between the total amount of public money spent and the total expenditure of money from all sources? Clearly, we want to encourage private home owners to spend money on improving their homes. There is a very good example in the hon. Lady's constituency, whereby Christchurch borough council carried out a large-scale voluntary transfer and, as a result, the new Twineham housing association has managed to bring forward many of its energy improvements, and now has one of the most energy-efficient housing stocks in the country. That shows what imagination and the powers granted by the Government can achieve together.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. He touched upon the question of private home owners and private rented stock. It is difficult to know what local authorities should try to do once they have collected information or made a general assessment about the housing in their area. There is a practical difficulty in making general comments about the wide range of housing that is not owned by local authorities. The problem with home energy conservation is that it is necessary to make an assessment of each housing type, and making general comments about whole areas of housing suggests that the state is capable of achieving a more desirable outcome than is possible in reality.

I draw attention to a letter that I received from the Construction Industry Council. Of all the letters that I have received on this subject, it is the most significant. The council is a forum for professional bodies within the construction industry, which speaks for more than 330,000 construction professionals. It includes organisations such as the National House Building Council, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Royal Town Planning Institute. The appearance of others suggests a greenness that they might not possess—such as the British Flat Roofing Council and the Ground Forum. No doubt they are both worthy organisations and, with others in the membership of the CIC, they represent a strong lobby in favour of the hon. Lady's Bill.

It is satisfying when the House produces a Bill that enjoys broad consensus. I congratulate the hon. Lady again, and wish her Bill every success, and I look forward to it becoming law.

1.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I apologise for not being present for the start of the debate, but I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) on a sensible Bill, which I hope will progress through the House.

The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) was asked whether he would have a big factory in his constituency. I would do so. My constituency has one available space of 1,500 hectares, which I am sure could be successfully developed. St. Helens needs employment.

The Bill offers hope for the old and tired, and for those who are poor—who will have warm houses—and opportunities for St. Helens, which is a centre of manufacture of insulating materials. The Bill is therefore well balanced. It meets social need at a time when it must be met. If the weather forecasters are right, many people living in badly insulated houses who cannot afford heating will be cold this weekend. There are many poor people in this land and the Bill offers them hope.

The Bill offers hope also to many unemployed people, who will find work installing insulation materials, while improving the standard of the country's housing stock and factories. If only the Government would adopt the same balance with every Bill they brought before the House, we might live in a much happier land.

1.32 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): As one of the Bill's sponsors, it is not surprising that I welcome it. I am sorry that the Energy Conservation Bill, promoted by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in 1993, failed. If the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) succeeds, at least that will be better than failing with proposed legislation that goes further.

I deeply regret the Government's change of mind on the 1993 Bill. In the final stages, I tabled an amendment—although, when it was not called, out of party loyalty I went along with the Government. My heart, as my amendment showed, was clearly with the Bill being passed.

The main reason for supporting the Bill is not energy conservation but the aim of making life better for people on low incomes. Better insulation and energy conservation will save money for all, but they matter most to people with the least resources to pay for heating. I am glad that the Bill focuses strongly on local authorities and other large housing providers. I do not blame individuals, but it is scandalous that heating systems in individual homes and blocks of flats have been left unassessed decade after decade.

It is a sad truth that people who have the least have the most expensive forms of heating. In my constituency, as in many others, some families are still expected to heat their water by using a solid fuel back-boiler in summer. I regard that as wrong. People in my constituency who were living in tower blocks—similar to a block called Nightingale Heights on an estate in my constituency—were left with a heating system which was designed by people who never had to live in a local authority tower block. The system was designed 20 or 30 years ago, when everyone thought that electricity was going to be dirt cheap. The flats had an underfloor electric heating system which did not work, and people with one-bedroomed flats had to spend £20 a week during the winter months, to be cold.

In Nightingale Heights—thanks to the efforts of one local person in particular, Sheila Mudie, to whom I pay tribute—people now spend about £5 a week to be warm. The gains in comfort and safety are important. I remember a retired soldier, who must have been about 85, sitting in front of a single-bar electric fire with a dressing gown on his back and a blanket on his knees, while his elderly wife tried to care for him. They had fuel poverty and actual poverty because they did not have enough support.

The landlord in that case was the local authority, but I do not want to damn Greenwich council. Criticism in this debate should steer away from those who give their time as councillors and Members of Parliament to try to serve people. The landlord had known for more than 15 years that the heating system which was designed for the block did not work, and that people could not afford it even if it did work.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, who was then the Housing Minister, for meeting deputations and helping to get the problems of that tower block dealt with. The Bill provides an incentive to local and central Government to work out an action programme so that the problems of every tower block like Nightingale Heights can be dealt with in a reasonably short period. People who live on income support—whether they are elderly or with children—do not deserve to have to spend the highest amounts, as well as the highest proportion of their income, on the necessity of staying warm.

I hope that the hon. Member for Christchurch understood what I said in my first intervention. I did understand the provisions for the Order in Council for Northern Ireland. My point is that Northern Ireland has at present one public housing authority—the Northern Ireland Housing Executive—and it should be possible for the executive to say that it will carry on the work that it was doing when I served as a Minister in Northern Ireland about five years ago. The executive should regard the Bill as already applying to it and should make public the results of its work and the time scale for conducting an assessment. I hope that it will go on to set an example to the rest of the United Kingdom of what action is to be taken.

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

I shall divert slightly to say that one of the benefits of the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity has been that people have not automatically gone on thinking that coal is the only fuel from which electricity for domestic purposes can be supplied by power stations in Northern Ireland. I welcome the fact that gas is likely to come to Northern Ireland, giving people a choice of fuels.

It is worth noting that, if one flies over Northern Ireland on a snowy day, one can see that insulation is not in place everywhere that it might be. One does not need an infra-red survey to do that, as it can be seen with ordinary vision. If there is the advantage of having gas as an alternative, the coal trade may meet people's needs at keener prices than it would if it did not have competition.

If we had just gone ahead with the original plans for extending one power station at Kilroot, people would have found themselves paying more—in absolute and relative terms—for fuel. We are now giving people choice by producing electricity in cheaper ways and by bringing gas back to Northern Ireland.

The issue of the partnership between local government and the people—the Government are there as partners—is an important point. I should like to think that the pattern of the Bill can be promoted in other ways, but this is not the time to go on to a major debate on another subject. Local authorities should, for example, find ways of making surveys of the opportunities available for young people, especially teenagers, after school. Finding out where the gaps are and providing more worthwhile activities for people in their leisure time would also be welcome. I do not see all the provisions leading necessarily to significant extra funding for the survey work. Local authorities should try to use existing resources. There can be significant savings to local authorities in many ways in the subjects that we are discussing.

It is clear that local authorities own many buildings that are not for occupation as residences by their tenants or by others. I suspect that the energy audit should be used on those buildings as well. Only a few years ago, it was common for the heating in schools in London under the control of the Inner London education authority to be left on seven days a week. That was remarkable—I am talking of the days when I used to go to schools rather more often than I do nowadays. It is good to have a swimming pool available for use by the general public or authorised clubs and other users, but it was peculiar to find that classrooms were being heated when they were not visited by anyone for 48 hours.

It might be useful to hear in Committee or at a later stage what the Government are doing in their own buildings. When I was serving as an assistant Minister in the Department of Employment 10 years ago, the number of budget holders in different parts of the Department who had responsibility for their own heating bills was slender. There were staff who had put off installing a water meter, which would have cut costs by about £100 per member of staff. Whether it is heating, the telephone or water, people often find that they have a greater advantage in taking action when they are responsible for paying the bill themselves.

The Bill goes much further than local authorities examining their own properties; it bears also on what private occupiers, whether privately renting or owner-occupiers, are doing. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Minister talked about people leaving their homes for a significant period and not turning down their boiler or not turning it off. Most of us are conscious of turning off the electric light when we leave a room in our house. However, we often leave our heating on for much longer periods, at much greater cost and resulting in waste. That is a matter for individual action. When it comes to energy conservation, more efficient heating and greater insulation, we should encourage people to take rational action once, and it will then become self-working. The costs of carrying out necessary works can often be met by people's own budgeting and self-gain. Many things can be done that will pay for themselves within a year. Other provisions pay for themselves over a much longer period but are still worth while.

Many courses of action meet people's wishes in other ways. One of the associated features of the right to buy is visible in many of the homes in my constituency. When people have the chance of owning their own home, they often want to build a porch, which stops all the warm air leaving the house every time they go in or out. They may change their windows and install double or even triple glazing. These things are done not only to conserve energy but because they benefit individuals generally.

Although the Bill may be adjusted in Committee, it is to be welcomed. It is right to pay tribute to the Association for the Conservation of Energy, which has been raising awareness in the House for many years. I think that it has aided all those Members who introduced similar Bills in the past, to whom I pay tribute.

I return to a matter that is of especial concern to me—

Mr. Nigel Evans: I mentioned new technology aiding energy conservation. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should be doing more to develop new technology? For example, many of us use computers that switch themselves off if a mouse is not moved or if no other action is taken; we can choose how long or short that period should be. In the Millbank offices there are smart lights, which are off if no one is around and are triggered automatically when a Member enters the area. On the security front, many people have installed smart lights. They do not have a constant light outside shining in the garden, but a light is triggered immediately if an intruder or visitor comes. Therefore, it saves money when it is off but gives security when it is needed.

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend did a service to the House in making those points.

The advantage of the Bill is that it will encourage people to make assessments and reports, then lead to a time scale for action. That is where we start to get follow-through benefits. When a significant proportion of people start doing the things that make sense and use modern technology, as well as some of the things that we have known about for some time, for example, condensing boilers, we can get the benefits of that technology and energy without the waste.

It is important to cut out the waste and get the no-cost and low-cost investment brought forward. Many of us will need reminding. I remember that, the second time when which I was involved in an energy debate, we managed to get the House authorities to change the lights in the room where we were to low-energy bulbs. It was not

frightfully complicated to arrange. Some of our older fittings may have needed some adjustment, but we should realise that in many ways we are behind the times.

I return to the major driving force—poverty. There is an enormous responsibility on us all to ensure that so many people do not have to continue struggling with the depression, difficulty and discomfort that poverty brings. When I last saw the figures—they may have changed since—60 per cent. of pensioner households had homes with inefficient heating. I am not arguing that the most efficient heating is central heating, because there are many different ways in which to provide low-cost, convenient heating without breaking the purse or the bank—for example, solid fuel. I feel strongly that, until we have a programme that says that, within a certain number of years, 95 per cent. of pensioner households will have low-cost, efficient heating, central Government, local government and our communities will not have done the job properly.

Mrs. Maddock: I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman has said, because I had considerable problems with getting a name for the Bill. I believe, as he does, that although the Bill does not get double glazing in the home, that is what it will lead to. That is why I was so keen for the name of the Bill to be the Home Energy Conservation Bill. I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his contribution. It has helped very much in making that argument.

Mr. Bottomley: I shall go a stage further. Like other hon. Members, I occasionally have constituents coming to me who say that they have been given a housing offer—often at the time of family formation, perhaps when they have a child, or when, for some reason, they have to move away from where they had been lodging or living. They say that the home that they have been offered is full of condensation, that it is damp and that the heating is absent or inadequate. I do not know why we do not have the same check on local housing authority offers as that carried out by most building societies or lending institutions on a flat or home that is to be bought with a mortgage. Why do we not require local housing authorities or housing associations—or, for that matter, central Government if they are letting premises to members of staff or offering houses under the empty homes initiative—to undertake a heating audit of their properties, and to go through a simple checklist: whether there is draught-proofing; whether a boiler is present and whether, if it is 10 or 15 years old, it should be replaced; whether the multipoint heater, if present, has been checked for safety, and so on? Those simple things are not directly required by the Bill, but they should become a habit and a self-imposed requirement by people who own a home.

I make a simple plea: I hope that everyone who provides a home for students is asked by the central lettings authority at universities or colleges to certify that the heating system has been checked. One constituent rightly badgers me about the lodgings of his child, who is at university, where it appears that the heating system is positively dangerous.

I want to return to the focus on poverty. Those most likely to be poor are pensioners, people at the time of family formation, when housing costs tend to be highest, income to be lowest and choice to be least, and those coming out of institutions—prison or the services—who do not have the same housing choices as those of us in Parliament.

I missed the middle part of the debate because I was talking to the parliamentary representative of Church Action on Poverty, Catherine Shelley. She rightly said that it was important to give local people a national voice on the issues that matter to them. The group's literature refers specifically to those who do not think that they can keep their homes as warm as they should be for themselves and for those for whom they are responsible. I hope that, in the discussions on the Bill, voluntary associations and the energy conservation authorities—local authorities—will talk openly about what they are managing to achieve, where they are managing to find resources, private and public, and where there is measurable change.

If we want to be accountable, we need to be able to count. How many homes are there? What is the progress towards making a significant impact? We know that we cannot change overnight the number of homes that are inadequately heated or insulated, but we can set targets. The surveys and reports that the Bill will encourage and require are one way forward. If we want to be able to help people to manage, we must be able to measure what is happening. We need to know how many people are fulfilling a public responsibility to help with housing that is a constant drain on the purse or the pay packet.

It is clear that the Bill will not have great difficulty in its passage through the House. However, we are still left with the question of VAT on energy-saving materials. The dominant issue is not whether there is a differential rate of VAT or no VAT on those materials, but there would be a symbol if the Government took seriously the fact that many people will be using mostly their own money on energy-saving measures. I am not suggesting that every boiler should be VAT free because modern boilers save energy—that might be going too far—but reconsidering the rate of VAT on some simple insulation and draught-proofing materials would be an important step and would neatly fit in with the Bill.

1.53 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) both on her success in the ballot and on her willingness to take over, in modified form, a subject that I raised in a Bill that I introduced in the last Session. I also congratulate her on the way in which she introduced the subject this morning and on the care that she has taken in preparing the Bill, which has been reflected in the favourable comments made by hon. Members.

When I brought my Bill before the House, I said many times that the issue would return to the House again and again. It has, and in a very constructive atmosphere, which I welcome. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) will share my pleasure and satisfaction because, in some ways, he is regarded as the grandfather of today's Bill, having introduced a similar Bill in the Session before I introduced mine, on which mine was based. At each stage, we have added further requirements.

My hon. Friend and I are grateful to those hon. Members who have taken part in today's debate and who have shown universal support for the Bill. I refer to the hon. Members for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), for Denton

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who has been a loyal supporter, and to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), who spoke on behalf of the Labour party. I was struck by the phrase of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley, who said that, on energy conservation, the time for procrastination had gone and now was the time for action. I was delighted to hear him say that, and I know that the Government have got that message. That is why we are making such good progress.

Hon. Members rightly referred to the differences between last year's Energy Conservation Bill and the current Bill. Those differences reflect some of the comments made during debates in the last Session which conjured up the rather delightful picture of me as the extreme radical and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch as the moderate. For this purpose, I am happy to accept that role.

The improvements in the Bill which have especially commended themselves to Conservative Members are some reductions in the direct obligations placed on local authorities and the fact that the Bill states that it confers no power of entry. The earlier Bill did not do that either, but it is understandable that hon. Members welcome the fact that the matter is now made absolutely clear and avoids doubt.

Those changes and others could have been made in Committee last year, but the Government tabled only six amendments and they did not include those points. On Report, they tabled far more amendments than they could possibly have needed in any serious attempt to sort out the Bill. At one stage, they were reduced to putting in Tellers against an amendment which they had moved and which I had accepted. That was part of the process of trying to block the Bill. At that time, the Government were coping with Treasury objections to the Bill, and Ministers have been working on that ever since.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) for his efforts. He was formerly a supporter of the earlier Bill and we complained about the position in which he found himself on 1 November last year when he had to support a measure deploring it. That was absurd. He has obviously done a great deal of work since then and his constructive contribution to this debate and the spirit in which the debate has been conducted are welcome.

The progress that we have made in the debate owes a good deal to the persistence of all those who have supported it, those outside who have continued to show interest in the subject, those who have continually written to Members and those who have won the support of local authorities and other organisations. I pay tribute to all of them for what they have done.

The Minister said that he wanted to make good use of time in Committee. That is right, and the Government made a mistake last year in not making good use of that stage to put the Bill in an acceptable form. We shall probably have a few skirmishes in Committee and at times we may feel that the Government are pushing a bit too far in weakening the Bill's impact. But perhaps not—perhaps the conversion is more extensive. Some of the issues raised by the Minister and by hon. Members can almost certainly be ironed out in Committee.

I hope that we can make some progress on Northern Ireland, about which the hon. Member for Eltham spoke. Perhaps we can at least have an indication from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive of a time scale in which the Bill's provisions for Northern Ireland might be brought into effect, because the Bill gives the Minister an opportunity to make provision at a later stage.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: For the benefit of those who may be drafting amendments for the Government to consider, may I refer them to the happenstance that, last year, each Government amendment was out of order? Care should be taken this time to make sure that amendments are in order so that they can be discussed.

Mr. Beith: That would be a great help, and I am sure that the Minister has taken the hon. Gentleman's intervention on board and that he, like us, will learn from last year's experiences.

The Bill is not just about energy conservation strategy, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and others have stressed, that is needed and the Bill can provide important parts of it. It is also about generating local initiative, enthusiasm and partnerships between the public and private sectors on an informed and cost-effective basis. The very process of gathering information for the studies that are required by the Bill can enable local authorities to harness the enthusiasm of industry, home owners and landlords and contribute to local informed debate so that people can see what could be achieved by investment in energy conservation. If that is carried out locally, it will be the most effective way forward. I think that the Government now recognise that.

We must reduce the demand for energy and we can do that by improvements that enable those who are most vulnerable to have warmer homes at lower cost. The Bill will enable us to map out the route to that destination. I am delighted that it has made such good progress.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Energy-Saving Materials (Rate of Value Added Tax) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.59 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I shall be brief, mainly because the Bill contains only three substantive clauses, and is remarkably modest and sensible. Although there are only three main clauses, there are four areas in which its aims can be identified. They are: to stimulate home insulation work; to generate employment in the home insulation industry, which is especially labour intensive; to complement the Home Energy Conservation Bill, which has just received its Second Reading; and to make coherent the use of taxation as part of the Government's environmental and energy conservation policies.

Clause 1 requires the Secretary of State to draw up a list of energy-saving materials or products to be covered by the Bill. Clause 2 reduces the rate of value added tax on such materials to one that is no higher than that applying to VAT on domestic fuel and power.

May I draw hon. Members' attention to the list? Clause 1(2) distinguishes the products which are to be automatically included:

"all such materials or products which are used solely for the purpose of improving the energy efficiency of buildings."

I am grateful to the Association for the Conservation of Energy, which set out the type of materials that it thought would be included automatically in that list. Its list includes domestic heating controls, draught-proofing materials, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, hot water tank jackets and low-emissivity glazing.

The association has also advised me that it was important to give the Secretary of State additional powers of discretion to include in the Government's list items whose primary purpose is to contribute towards improvements in energy efficiency in buildings, but which also have auxiliary purposes, and I gladly took that advice in drafting clause 1(3). The list could, with time, be varied. The key point is that, once the Minister had exercised the duty to produce a list and the discretion to include additional items, an adjustment in the level of VAT that applied to those items would automatically follow.

Although it is a strange experience for me, I must acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). In his Budget speech on 16 March 1993, the then Chancellor voiced for the Government a new principle of taxation. He felt that it was important to set the principle down, before the House, as one that ought to apply for the 21st century. The former Chancellor said:

"For the first time, the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power will be the same as that charged on goods like loft insulation material, which improve energy efficiency. This will bring to an end the current anomaly, which makes nonsense of any attempt to use the tax system to improve the environment."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 183.]

The former Chancellor pursued an impeccable logic—it is transparent nonsense to tax goods that save energy more heavily than we tax energy consumption—and I am deeply grateful to him for making us face that stark reality. There is no point in having environmental or energy conservation policies that are moving in one direction, when the weight of the tax system pulls in the opposite direction.

It cannot be in the Government's interest to hold a view the de facto consequence of which acts as a disincentive to people to pursue energy efficiency measures such as insulating their homes to reduce their energy bills. We must take the former Chancellor at his word and accept the Government's new logic, and simply apply it to correct the anomaly that exists today. Although the House decided to reduce VAT on domestic fuel bills to 8 per cent., VAT on home insulation materials remains at 17.5 per cent.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The hon. Gentleman said that VAT on fuel had been reduced to 8 per cent. What happened was that the second tranche of VAT was not implemented. Does he agree that, had it been implemented, it would have been extremely difficult to bring the rate back to 8 per cent., which could have been done only with the agreement of other EU countries?

Mr. Simpson: It would have been difficult, but not impossible. Although we decided to keep VAT on domestic fuel at 8 per cent., the anomaly which the former Chancellor identified in terms of the gap between the tax on energy-saving materials and the tax on energy use remains. The purpose of the Bill is to try to pursue the logic of the former Chancellor's argument and remove the tax anomaly we face today.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be sensible for the Government to look seriously at that problem, because the logic of the position described by my hon. Friend is that we should try to create a taxation regime that assists energy conservation while helping the poorest people in society?

Mr. Simpson: Absolutely. That compelling point of logic will have to intrude on all aspects of our taxation policies in the coming years. Moreover, as I said in the earlier debate, if the Government raise the tax on energy use, it is the poorest people who will have the least scope for exercising elasticity of demand in terms of the fuel they use. For those at the lowest end of the income scale, raising taxes on fuel use is demand inelastic. We must find ways to give low-income households easier access to energy-reducing materials to make their homes more energy-efficient.

Although my proposals involve a cost, huge benefits stem from directly targeting our resources into areas where they will have the greatest environmental impact. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) was right to make that point. I am grateful to the Association for the Conservation of Energy for doing some work for me in calculating the total costs that are likely to stem from the Bill, if the Government give it the support that it should receive. Before deciding about the Bill, hon. Members will want to know the scale of costs that they are letting the Government in for. ACE said:

"The initial effects would be an estimated loss to the Treasury of less than £10 million per annum. This does not, however, account for the estimated 10 per cent. increase in sales of energy efficiency goods which would result.

The ultimate effect would be a reduction in the net loss to the Government of £2 million to £8 million per annum."

[Mr. Simpson]

A maximum loss of £8 million, but possibly as little as £2 million, shows that the cost element is minute. To put it in the context of the revenues the Government currently receive from VAT alone, that reduction would amount to a 0.02 per cent. loss from total VAT revenues of £38.9 million in 1993-94.

That minute cost would eliminate an absurd anomaly in the tax system. It would stimulate at least a 10 per cent. growth in sales of energy-saving materials, and would contribute about 10 times that amount to improving the quality of life for those who suffer the blight of fuel poverty. It would generate its own contribution to the energy saving targets set out in the Home Energy Conservation Bill and the Government's conservation measures.

I urge hon. Members to support the Bill, which is simple, logical and overwhelmingly positive, in terms both of its limited cost and of its important impact.

2.10 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): This is a rather sad little debate because the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), who has gained the privilege of such a position in the private Members' ballot that he now has the opportunity to discuss his Bill on the Floor of the House, has proposed the Energy-Saving Materials (Rate of Value Added Tax) Bill.

I share the objective as enunciated by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, that it is sensible to tax the materials for energy saving at the same rate as we tax energy or vice versa. I voted for that principle in the House before Christmas. It is the hon. Member for Nottingham, South and his party who have voted for the current inconsistency. I suppose that that inconsistency would be excusable if we had a reasonable remedy to put that matter right. The Bill does not offer a consistent remedy, however, because the hon. Gentleman made absolutely no mention of the problems faced because of what has been agreed under the sixth VAT directive.

The Bill might have some validity if it contained the words, "This Bill shall come into force notwithstanding the European Communities Act 1971." As someone who has devoted a little time to such difficulties, I would be quite tempted to vote for the Bill just to see what would happen. It would be interesting to see whether Ministers implemented a policy that they had been instructed to implement by Parliament, which they knew to be in contravention of European Community law. It would be interesting to see whether Ministers responded to Parliament or to European Community law. If they responded to Parliament, it would be interesting to see how the European Community institutions reacted. Would they respect the decision of our sovereign Parliament or attempt to tell us that our sovereignty has been, in the words of Helmut Kohl, "consigned to the boot"?

What would be most interesting is whether, if there was a conflict between Ministers and European institutions, which was to be decided by the courts, our own courts upheld the most recent action of Parliament—the passage of the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South—or whether they gave precedence to a preceding Bill. They would thereby implement what many of us suspect may be happening by slow process of attrition: that this Parliament is slowly becoming bound by the decisions of previous Parliaments. For all those reasons, I think that this is curious ground to fight on.

Mr. Simpson: I am slightly confused about the argument that the hon. Gentleman makes, and I should be grateful if he clarified it. I well recognise the long arguments that he has attempted to bring before the House about the relative powers of the House and the European Community, and the arguments that he has repeatedly tried to make about the sovereign authority of the House. I was confused because I wanted to clarify whether he is now saying that the measure that I have brought before the House cannot be supported because it would put us in conflict with European policies, or whether he is saying the opposite, that it should be supported because it reasserts the authority and sovereignty of the House and, as such, is a measure that should command the support of the whole House.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I intended to say in the closing moments of my speech—that, however tempted I might be to test that specific aspect of Parliament on the Bill, the Bill is inconsistent and inappropriate, because it would have been logical to require VAT to be increased to the full rate of 17.5 per cent. I have no idea what the future will hold; perhaps we shall have to leave that for some future Government, of whatever hue. The pattern of taxation in all developed countries is moving away from taxation on income towards taxation on expenditure and, if we want to achieve our targets, perhaps that is what we shall have to do, in the fulness of time.

The Bill exposes completely the hypocrisy of Opposition Members who, like the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), argue constantly for greater European integration and more qualified majority voting and for unthinking acceptance of a single European currency.

Mr. Gapes *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: If I malign the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, I apologise, but the hon. Member for Ilford, South certainly fits into that category, and I give way to him with immense pleasure.

Mr. Gapes: I do not want to divert the debate to other subjects. We are in danger of moving away from the subject of energy conservation, and it would be wise if we had a proper debate at another time rather than discuss other subjects. But I wish to object to the words, "unthinking acceptance of a single currency" and simply register that that is not my position.

Mr. Jenkin: I am encouraged. I shall not be drawn down that path; I simply note that it is the policy of European Community institutions to move towards fiscal harmonisation as a means of achieving economic and monetary union, and the Bill is in direct conflict with that. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South received much encouragement from his colleagues, because Conservative Members know that they want to drag us down that path.

In any case, I urge rejection of the Bill because of its inconsistent approach to taxation policy.

2.17 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I applaud the sentiments behind the Bill—the desire of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) for energy conservation and his wish to concentrate the emphasis on the matter. I understand the desirability of that. However, in this morning's debate, that was discussed highly constructively.

There are significant problems in the Bill. The most significant problem is the issue of an intermediate rate of VAT. I speak with some experience of that matter. The town of Newmarket is in my constituency. For many years, the bloodstock industry argued strongly in an attempt to reduce the rate of VAT payable on the sale of bloodstock to a level comparable with that of the Republic of Ireland and of France. I felt, at the time, that that was wholly wrong and argued with members of the industry, because I believe that it is important that this country does not go down the route of having countless different levels of VAT. The complications of that from a fiscal and administrative point of view are enormous.

There are many worthy causes. Every hon. Member knows of constituents who have an interest in a particular subject and are pleading for a lower rate of VAT. The VAT rate of 8 per cent. on domestic fuel came about as a result of events with which we are all familiar—it is an exceptional case that arose as a result of a vote in the House. In all my experience of dealing with the difficult problems of the bloodstock industry, one message came through loud and clear. If we have different levels of VAT, we shall open a can of worms for many people. It would present difficulties for the Treasury and the administration of the country's fiscal and tax-raising systems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) mentioned the sixth VAT directive, of which I have experience through my negotiations on behalf of the bloodstock industry. A European Union list gives scope for reduced VAT levels on certain goods and services. But the blunt truth is that energy-efficient goods are not included on the list. I hope that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South heard that. The heart of the Bill is incompatible with European law. It will not be possible in practice to obtain a lower rate of VAT for energy-efficient goods and services. If the provision became law, it would result in a clash between the British Government and the European Union. There were many blood-curdling negotiations about what should be included on the reduced list originally and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that list is unlikely to be changed in any way.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that other states of the European Union already have different rates of VAT for different products and services? Why should not we in this country ensure that energy conservation is not penalised by tax as it is at present?

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands. I entirely support the British Government's position. Given the great difficulties with intermediate rates of VAT that we have seen on the continent, it is right to have two rates of VAT: zero and 17.5 per cent.—it makes for good administration. After a considerable amount of negotiation and after agreement among the European member nations about its scope, a list was drawn up of possible goods and services that would attract reduced VAT. Energy-efficient goods and services were not on the list. I am sorry to have to disappoint the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng).

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, notwithstanding the vote of the House last month, he proposes that VAT on fuel should be increased to 17.5 per cent? That is the logic of his position.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands. A specific technical point defeats the essence of the Bill. It is not possible for us to go to the European Union and ask for a separate rate of VAT on energy-efficient goods. That proposition lies at the heart of the Bill and it is a flaw in the Bill. I am not here to argue whether it would be good or bad were we to be allowed to take that action under European law. But I have stated the position, which is precisely the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) does not understand the sixth VAT directive that we have agreed. One is not allowed to reduce VAT rates of below 15 per cent., only increase them. One is allowed to reduce VAT rates only if they are already above 15 per cent., and then only to the rate of 15 per cent.

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for further clarifying the position.

I applaud the sentiment behind the Bill—to encourage good practice in energy conservation. As we heard in this morning's debate, a plethora of measures have been sponsored by the Government on different levels to achieve that end—good practice in energy conservation and the reduction of heating bills. That is happening in practice at the moment.

Mr. Simpson: I am not sure whether we can resolve the matter in the Chamber this afternoon. While drafting the Bill, I checked whether it was within our legal competence to propose a measure that reduced the level of value added tax on home insulation products from 17.5 per cent. to 8 per cent. I was told very clearly that the measures set out in the Bill are perfectly legal and are within the sovereign powers of the House to decide. That is the ruling that I received on the specific point with which the hon. Gentlemen are taking issue.

Mr. Spring: I do not think that it is fruitful to bandy interpretations of the sixth European Community value added tax directive. However, I was not called the bloody boring Member for bloodstock by a Treasury Minister because I was not involved directly in this area of concern and activity. I believe that I am correct, and if the hon. Gentleman looks more carefully at the issue, he will realise that.

I am concerned about the talk of a "definitive list" of materials in the preamble to the Bill. How would the list be derived and what are the bureaucratic implications of such a list? While I understand and sympathise with the Bill and the sentiment behind it, for the reasons that I have enunciated, I believe that it is flawed and therefore essentially unacceptable.

2.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am glad to be able to contribute to the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) said, it is immaterial whether we think that it is a good or a bad measure. I think that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson)—I understand that he is a good pro-European—will be somewhat relieved if the Energy-Saving Materials (Rate of Value Added Tax) Bill, although well-intentioned, gets no further today. Even if we passed the Bill, we would be prevented from reducing the rate of value added tax by the sixth European Community VAT directive.

Mr. Jenkin: It is very important that hon. Members assert that we are able to legislate on anything because we are a sovereign Parliament. However, the measure would bring us into conflict with European Community law, with all its attendant consequences, which may not be desirable in this case.

Mr. Evans: Of course we can pass any legislation that we like. However, if we were to go to the European Union and say, "By the way, we've decided to reduce the rate of VAT to 8 per cent. on this list of energy conservation items," the Union would say no. That would be the end of it and we could not implement the measure.

The legislation is fraught with problems. In the past, we had more than two rates of VAT. We now have the zero and 8 per cent. rate of VAT, and in the past we had a normal rate and a luxury goods rate as well. Perhaps the hon. Member for Nottingham, South is suggesting that we should go back to the days when we had three levels of VAT: a zero rate, a middle rate of perhaps 8 per cent. and another rate. If we pass the Bill today, there is nothing to say that we could not reintroduce a luxury goods rate of VAT.

I wonder whether the legislation is a precursor to the Labour party's change of attitude towards VAT. I bandied words with the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) in an earlier debate, and I suspect that I will do no better now than I did then in trying to tease out of her the Labour party's policies on VAT or any other issue. The legislation may be a precursor to the Labour party introducing a range of levels of VAT on certain goods. Newspapers are zero-rated, and there were arguments for and against that. The same is true of young children's clothes. Food was mentioned time and again. I wonder whether the Labour party has it in mind to introduce an 8 per cent. rate on food. We know already how sensitive Labour is, after it made the faux pas the other day in respect of public school fees, when one Labour figure intimated that Labour was seriously considering imposing VAT on public school fees. It was only a matter of moments before—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 27 January.

WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 January.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Mr. George Mudie be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Mike Watson be added to the Committee.— [*Mr. Bates.*]

BROADCASTING

Ordered,

That Mr. Nicholas Brown be discharged from the Select Committee on Broadcasting and Mr. John Battle be added to the Committee.— [*Mr. Bates.*]

Brent Irish Centre

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): It gives me no pleasure to raise this subject, because a valuable public resource and a major contribution to the Irish community in London is facing either closure by the Charity Commissioners or, more seriously, the arrest and imprisonment of many of the leading figures who administer the organisation day to day.

Although many of the people to whom I shall be referring are members of the Conservative party in an individual capacity, I do not suggest for one moment that events at the Irish centre in Brent are in any way a general slur on the Conservative party either nationally or locally. One is dealing with individuals who have gone beyond the bounds of acceptable public behaviour in their conduct of financial affairs when in receipt of public money and in dealing with value added tax returns.

I shall not go into detail because police and Customs and Excise investigations are currently under way and the Charity Commissioners are also investigating the matter, but I will try to bring home what has occurred— not that I can do much to aid those investigations, but to flag up out of all the chaos the fact that the centre should be preserved because it has been the recipient of large sums of public money from both Labour and Conservative Administrations and because it makes a valuable contribution and could make an even more valuable one to London and Londoners.

The centre was established in 1983 following a grant from the Greater London council. Until 1991, apart from the occasional rows that normally occur in voluntary organisations, things went fairly well. Problems started in 1990, when Brent had a hung council. A capital grant was proposed for essential works, including access for the disabled and elderly who required a lift, and for a library and facilities for the performing arts. The whole package was costed at £231,000. Brent council agreed to pay £137,000, with £94,000 to come in matching funds from the Irish centre itself.

Brent council then underwent a change of control to a Conservative majority and three Conservative members were appointed to the centre's management committee: Councillors Alan Wall, Jack Sayer and Cormack Moore. There were also management changes. Mr. Brendan Mulkere became company secretary and Mr. Murray, vice-chairman of the local Conservative association, became chair.

The situation began to deteriorate when the council changed its controls on expenditure and waived its conditions on the grant. Instead of a report from the Brent Irish centre to the council and other normal council procedures, it was accepted that in future the council would be happy if there was simply a report to the leader of the council. Anyone with any local government experience will know that it is unusual to bypass the committee system. Sadly, the money did not go to the agreed areas: the lift was never installed, the library never appeared and the changing rooms for the artists were never built. Instead, the organisation—a registered charity— installed a new bar, following the demolition of a brand new fitted kitchen, and removed the existing facilities for the disabled.

At this point, one might have assumed that councillor Blackman, the leader of the council, and the three councillors on the committee might have raised a query and drawn the council's attention to the matter. At least one could assume that the money had been spent, but it depends on how one looks at it. Councillor Blackman was told by Mr. Mulkere, the secretary of the association, that £205,575 was spent on the works. That, of course, leaves £25,000 over, 60 per cent. of which would—under normal council procedures— have been returned to Brent council.

Mr. Mulkere never had the £94,000 matching funds in the first place, however, so the work had gone ahead under a false prospectus. The council was never told that, although the three councillors who were on the management committee were, of course, aware of it as they were present when all this was revealed. We need to know whether they reported this to the council.

One might perhaps be happy if one could assume that £205,575 had actually been spent. Sadly, once again it depends on who one talks to. The lowest tender for the works came from Lynch Contracts Ltd. at £134,584. There is a remarkable discrepancy between that figure and the sums which we were told were needed for the work. Instead of accepting the lowest tender, Mr. Mulkere persuaded the committee to have a system in which a site manager would manage the contract on a day-to-day basis, while employing direct labour and buying materials as required.

I cannot imagine any public authority regarding that as a satisfactory way of overseeing the safe conduct of public money. The limited records and the day-to-day passing back and forth of money open up the prospect of massive VAT fraud and evasion which one would not have to accept if a proper firm had come in and done the job under a proper contract.

The scheme also gave Mr. Mulkere day-to-day control over the process because of his ability to influence the site agent. In reality, we had a situation where Mr. Mulkere on occasions asked contractors for personal loans, which he subsequently repaid using Brent Irish Cultural and Community Association money and Brent Irish centre cheques. It was remarkable that Mr. Mulkere's day-to-day control gave him a position in which he was able to do that and I do not believe that councillors ever accepted that situation in the first place.

We must now look at what was spent. The architect, John Stokes, and the site agent, Mike Moran, both estimated that the cost of the work was between £130,000 and £140,000. Mr. Mulkere and the three councillors on the committee who were party to all this went on to tell the council that £205,575 had been spent. It seems remarkable that when the architect and site agent both said that £140,000 tops had been spent the council was nevertheless told that more than £200,000 has been spent.

Many of the invoices which exist are not necessarily genuine and the police and Customs and Excise have seized them and are investigating. I hope that their investigations will be carried out as speedily as possible, before the centre closes as a result of all the mismanagement that has gone on.

A particular instance in which Mr. Mulkere got a personal loan from a supplier of material was when he asked the supplier of the wood beam being used for a personal loan. That loan was eventually repaid by a

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

cheque from the Brent Irish centre totalling £8,477.29. The situation trundled on, and there was no report to the council.

On 29 May 1992, the general management committee had a meeting. Mr. Mulkere and the three councillors were present, and an extra £120,000 which was needed for further works was discussed. A month later, on 23 June, when Mr. Mulkere formally approached the council leader, Bob Blackman, the figure had risen to £180,000—a remarkable £60,000 inflation in just four weeks. Did the three councillors notice that? Did they warn Councillor Blackman? Did they alert council officers to the discrepancy? Did anyone object?

Some members of the management committee did indeed object to what was happening— and they were expelled from the committee. On 9 July 1992, the committee voted to expel three members—breaking its own rules under section 7 of its articles of association by failing to give 42 days' notice.

On 30 November 1992, Brendan Mulkere managed to get three new groups added as members and thus added votes on the management committee. On 17 December, a committee member was excluded on the ground that she had been replaced by another delegate from the organisation that she represented. She circulated a letter pointing out that she had joined the committee at the personal invitation of Mr. Mulkere and that, to her knowledge, the organisation that she was alleged to represent did not exist. She is the individual who made the loan to Mr. Mulkere to which I referred.

On 6 March 1993, expelled members wrote to Councillor Blackman raising the question of the financial integrity of the operation. They received no reply from him. On 3 April, Councillor Wall called for an emergency general meeting to deal with "subversive people". John Murray, the chair of the BICCA and vice-chair of the Conservative party said:

"Those members who have acted against BICCA's interests must be removed."

Financial integrity should not have been against the interests of the Brent Irish centre.

On 28 May, Councillor Sayer moved the acceptance of three new organisations and Councillor Moore gave notice of the suspension of four existing organisations, the Irish Mental Health Forum, two Irish language groups and the Irish Interest Group, which has campaigned locally on fares to travel to denominational schools, anti-Irish racism and citizenship issues.

On 1 July 1993, Councillor Moore moved the expulsion of four groups, claiming:

"democracy will be in action tonight."

Five of the new organisations which had been added to support Mr. Mulkere voted for the expulsion, although many of them are not known for their activities in the Irish community. Three councillors—the fact that they are Tories is irrelevant—voted for the expulsion, including the treasurer, who had no right to vote at the meeting.

Brent council's chief executive had now been alerted to the problem by a letter from the National Association of Local Government Officers on 22 April and by former expelled members of the Irish centre. The chief executive asked for an explanation. Brent's quantity surveyor eventually produced a report, which is cause for genuine concern. Brent's auditor, who was answerable within Brent council to the chair of the relevant committee, which was chaired by Councillor Wall, came under tremendous pressure with endless phone calls from the members concerned. He came to the conclusion that he did not need to interview the site agent or the architect and did not need to look into the personal loans that I have mentioned. Needless to say, the report is of little use.

Eventually, on 15 March 1994, the auditor's and quantity surveyor's reports were passed to the director of education. As I have said, the auditor had not fulfilled a role that would have been useful. Two days later, on 17 March, at the St. Patrick's day celebration, Councillor Blackman announced at the Brent Irish centre that he would propose additional grants of £70,000 to the centre, although the applications for the grants had arrived after the closing date determined by Brent council and should automatically have been ruled out of order and left to be considered in subsequent years. The following week, on 22 March, the grants committee agreed the additional grants.

On 27 March, Brendan Mulkere wrote to Bob Blackman, telling him that he wished to vary the purpose for which the grant had been awarded—a pretty rapid change of mind—with £36,000 to be spent on capital building works, many of which were the works which were supposed to have been carried out with the grant made available three years earlier but which had not been done. He said:

"if building works are to be completed within a month the money must be released immediately."

The remaining £34,000 was to be spent along similar lines to the original application, although it would be "a great help" if the funds could be released straight away as well, and not phased in over a year as would be the case for most organisations.

On 30 March, the director of Brent's voluntary sector team wrote to the Irish centre reminding it that

"the grant awarded cannot be used for any other purpose other than stated in your original application form."

On 5 April, the treasurer of the Irish centre wrote to the director of Brent's voluntary sector team, outlining the "revised budget" for the use of the £35,000 revenue grant, with £20,000 now to be spent on building works, £4,000 on refurbishments and the rest on activities and a printer.

On 6 April, Brendan Mulkere wrote to the director of the voluntary sector team, outlining the revised budget for the use of the £35,000 revenue grant, with £20,800 now to be spent on Mulkere's salary and £14,000 for an administrator's salary—although there is no administrator. The original application had included expenditure of £12,000 on "consultancy".

On 7 April, Charles Wood, the chief executive of Brent, received a letter from the Charity Commissioners, informing him that they were making inquiries into the centre and requesting information on grant aid. It was not dealt with. On 18 April, the Charity Commissioners wrote again, saying that they would like the information that they requested to be supplied, but there was no speed on the part of Brent to make that information available.

On 19 April, the director of the voluntary sector team, Mr. Eric Lye—a frequent drinker at the Irish centre—wrote to the people who had complained about misuse of public funds, but did not give the full information that he had available, although Brent's chief executive had said that it could be in the public domain.

The position deteriorated when, on 20 April, the director of education wrote to the leader of the council, saying that the management committee of the centre had asked for £20,000 of the grant money to be vired from revenue to capital purposes and for the money to be released in full in one lump sum. The leader was asked to approve that under delegated powers and did so two days later, returning the signed approval for money.

On 26 April, the director of the voluntary sector team wrote to the director of education, requesting approval for his decision not to release the full set of reports into the expenditure of the 1991 grant to the Irish centre. Subsequent letters from the director of education to members of the public who had complained confirmed his decision that the reports would not be made available, although the chief executive had said that they should be in the public domain.

On the same day, the director of education sent a fax to the director of the voluntary sector team, instructing him to release £70,000 immediately. For those people who have the misfortune to live in Brent and who die of old age waiting for a reply to any letter, such speed would be inconceivable.

Four days later, a leaflet was circulated in a marginal ward in Brent, where Councillor Sayers was seeking re-election, slandering the Labour candidate. It is clear that the leaflet had been drafted by Brendan Mulkere. It has all his style. It was, of course, completely illegal—it was not declared on anyone's election expenses—and had an impact on what is the highest concentration of Irish people in the Brent area. The matter was immediately raised with the police, who started an investigation.

Everyone denied that the leaflet had been produced. It is quite clear that it was a pay-off for loyal support. When Brent officers wrote to Mr. Mulkere asking what on earth was going on, he denied that any such leaflets had been issued by Brent Irish centre, but confirmed that he had recently written personally to Councillors Sayer, Wall and Moore, to thank them for their assistance. And well he might: they had supported every one of his moves to manage the finances of the centre, in their imaginative way. They voted to get rid of anybody who complained, and used their position on the council to get a favourable hearing from the leader of the council to the needs of Brendan Mulkere.

On 18 May, the Charity Commissioners wrote to the chief executive of Brent expressing concern that they had had a telephone call from the director of the voluntary sector team, Mr. Lye, in which he had said that he could not see why they needed to continue their investigation into the matters. Three days later, the director of the voluntary sector team—no doubt after an interesting conversation with Brent's chief executive—sent a letter to the Charity Commissioners saying that the telephone call was meant to be helpful and explaining that, in his view, none of the allegations had any substance. If there is no substance to the allegations, a vast amount of police, Customs and Excise and Charities Commission time is being spent investigating them.

I do not have the slightest doubt that Mr. Mulkere is a crook. In the 25 years that I have been an elected representative on various local authorities and subsequently in Parliament, I have never been more certain of any sentence that I have uttered. I have seen copies of some of the witness statements by people involved and I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Mulkere will be arrested and, if there is any justice, will go to prison.

What is more in doubt is where the issue moves away from Customs and Excise. I especially want to make the point that Customs and Excise should pass the information that it holds to the Government's auditors—perhaps the district auditor who has been doing such sterling work in Westminster—to investigate. Mr. Mulkere could not have got away with his criminal activities without the backing of the three councillors.

I want to make it absolutely clear that those three councillors are not representative of the Tory group, any more than they are representative of Brent as a whole. When I raised a matter relating to another councillor, I was delighted when the Tory group took action to remove him from his post. The vast majority of Brent councillors, Labour and Conservative, are completely honest, but the three to whom I referred clearly are not. Perhaps Mr. Moore was led by the two older and more senior members of the committee. Councillor Blackman, recognising the political importance of the support of the Irish centre in a key marginal ward in a tightly fought election, is perhaps more to blame. The auditors should investigate the matter in exactly the same way that other abuses of power have been investigated. I suspect that the money stolen from the taxpayer through VAT fiddles and the money that I suspect has been stolen from Brent council tax payers has been milling around in a slush fund and may have been used to fund the illegal election leaflet which appeared.

I do not have one moment's doubt that Councillor Wall and Councillor Sayers knew exactly what was going on and covered it up at every stage. Councillor Blackman, as leader of the council, intervened to change the grant and to do everything possible to assist Mr. Mulkere with a speed and enthusiasm for which I can find no parallel in my experience of local government. It was an unusually close personal relationship and I cannot seriously believe that someone as clever as Mr. Blackman was not aware of what was happening. I believe that he consciously knew that public money was being used to bribe a crook—Mr. Mulkere—to try and influence an election. As a quid pro quo, Brent council would not become involved in exposing the fraud in which Mr. Mulkere was involved.

I repeat that I am not making a general slur on the Tory party. Three or four individuals deserve to go to prison for what they have done, but they no more represent the generality of Conservative councillors than they do the generality of public officials. If we do not deal with them, it will reinforce what half the public already think—that any politician is in it for what he gets out of it.

2.52 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I reply to the debate as the Minister responsible for Customs and Excise, but not as the Minister responsible, even indirectly, for many of the events and allegations described by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). I am sure that he appreciates that point.

The hon. Gentleman referred extensively to events at or concerned with the Brent Irish centre, which is a club run by a committee through a limited company called the Brent Irish Cultural and Community Association Ltd. I shall refer to it in future by the acronym BICCA. The company is registered for VAT at the South Bank VAT

[Mr. David Heathcoat- Amory]

office in the London South collection office of Customs and Excise. That company is at the centre of inquiries by Customs and Excise.

The case is complicated, and as inquiries are in hand, it is not possible for me to comment on allegations. However, I shall give some background information.

Over a period, Customs and Excise officers at the South Bank local VAT office became aware of potential VAT irregularities concerning BICCA. Officers performed normal validation checks on purchase invoices recorded in BICCA's records by cross-referring to the suppliers in question. Mismatches were uncovered, and further more specific inquiries were initiated.

Customs required the original invoices to substantiate any successful action, and accordingly made an unannounced visit to BICCA on 19 December 1994. The officers were informed that the majority of the books and records had already been taken to Brent council's internal investigation team. It is thought that the council investigators are looking into the possible misuse of council funds.

Customs officers contacted the council investigation team and arranged to collect books and records from it. On 19 December 1994, contractors who had supplied materials and services to BICCA during building works in 1991-92 were also visited, and various sales records relating to that period were uplifted. Customs was able to confirm that some invoices listed in BICCA's records did not appear in the corresponding supplier's records.

I should make it clear that the somewhat separate issue of dealings between BICCA and Brent council or between BICCA and the GLC that was, is not a matter for Customs and Excise, unless VAT irregularities are involved. Some of the matters surrounding the case and described by the hon. Gentleman appear to be for the district auditor or the police. The hon. Gentleman said that a police investigation is under way. Customs and Excise is concerned not about how building work is funded or how trading is carried out, but about whether VAT is properly accounted for.

Certain individuals have been interviewed, and statements have been taken. There, I am afraid, the matter must rest. Customs inquiries are at an early and delicate stage, and disclosure of its future actions might prejudice the companies and individuals involved. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that further comment by me at this stage might damage innocent people, or, if fraud has taken place, might imperil the workings of justice.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in which non-EU countries legal aid is available to British citizens.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department does not maintain complete and up to date details of legal aid schemes in other countries. Many countries provide help to foreign nationals under the terms of their legal aid schemes.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in which EU countries British citizens are eligible for legal aid on a similar basis to the United Kingdom.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Legal aid is available to British citizens in each EU country under the terms of that country's legal aid scheme.

Breast Implants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to publicise the extension by the relevant court in the United States of the deadline to register potential claims arising from breast implants.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor does not involve himself in individual cases—except in his judicial capacity—and consequently his Department has no involvement with this litigation. I understand, however, that the Law Society intends to publish details of the extension before the end of the month.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what requests he has received from the Attorney-General of the Irish Republic or his officials asking to disclose to any third party the statement of facts in the Brendan Smyth case; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what confidentiality agreement exists between his Office and his counterpart in the Irish Republic; when the agreement was first made; when it is reviewed; and to what material the agreement is applied;

(3) when the statement of facts in the Brendan Smyth case was passed to the appropriate authorities in the Irish Republic; to whom it was passed; and if any conditions were imposed then or subsequently on the disclosure of the statement of facts to any third party;

(4) if he is willing for the statement of facts and other documents he supplied to the authorities in the Irish Republic concerning the extradition of Brendan Smyth to be passed to members of the Dail legislation and security committee.

The Attorney-General: A statement of the facts in the Brendan Smyth case was supplied to the Irish Attorney-General on 4 May 1993. In all cases where they are required, such statements are provided on a confidential basis for the limited purpose of allowing the Irish Attorney-General to decide whether to allow the warrants for the arrest of the person concerned to be backed for execution in the Republic. No specific conditions have been imposed in this case.

On 22 December 1994, officials in the Irish Attorney-General's Office contacted my office asking my attitude to the possible release of this statement by the Irish Attorney-General to the Select Committee of the Dail on Legislation and Security.

My view is that it is a matter for the Irish Attorney-General to judge whether it is appropriate to supply a copy of the statement to that Committee in this case. Full statements are provided on the basis and for the purpose stated above and it would in general be prejudicial to the administration of justice if they were to become public. The anonymity of the injured parties named in this statement has until now been maintained. There is an ongoing investigation in respect of further alleged offences and it is important that any subsequent trial should be fair.

I understand that the Irish Attorney-General has declined to disclose the statement to the Committee.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Public Services (Bad Practice)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for the future on identifying examples of bad practice in the delivery of public services.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: When public services are not delivered satisfactorily, this needs to be identified and—more important—put right to ensure good quality service. There is already a range of mechanisms in place for doing this, including inspectorates in many public services, the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. By requiring the setting of standards and the publishing of performance information against them, the citizens charter plays a major role in this process.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Cambridge

(Mrs. Campbell) on 1 December, *Official Report*, column *816*.

The Office of Public Services and Science has been, and will continue to be, at the forefront of Departments making information available over the Internet. The machinery of government division, the citizens charter unit and the office of science and technology have material accessible on the CCTA government information service, as do CCTA and HMSO. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and I shall continue to make available the text of ministerial speeches.

The CCTA—the Government centre for information systems—has my full support for its plans to expand the use and accessibility of Internet services, including the G-NET internet access service, which I announced at the emerging technology conference last week. This service makes Internet access, including G-MAIL electronic mail, available to every Government telephone network user at rates which will have the minimum impact on running costs. We are using the economies of scale which the GTN affords to maximise the ease with which government officials can get access to the Internet.

Information Technology Security

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on future responsibility for advising Government Departments on information technology security.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Two UK authorities advise Departments and agencies on information technology security. The Security Service, as part of its general protective security role, is responsible for non-technical aspects of IT security policy and standards, primarily in the physical and personnel security areas. Responsibility for the technical aspects of IT security policy and standards, which focus on IT hardware, software and communications, rests with the communications-electronics security group of the Government communications headquarters.

The CCTA—the Government centre for information systems—also provides security advice and guidance, which is based on the security policy and standards set by the two UK IT authorities. The CCTA integrates such security policy into its wider responsibility for the production of policy and best practice for information systems and IT.

Malaria Vaccine

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what funds the Medical Research Council is making available for research into malaria vaccine.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The funding of research into malaria vaccine will depend, as with other research areas, on the quality of the research proposals that the Medical Research Council receives. In the last financial year, 1993–94, the MRC's expenditure for research into malaria was £4.4 million. Included in this figure was £1.6 million, which was specifically spent on malaria vaccine research. The MRC is always willing to consider soundly based proposals in competition with other applications for support.

Science Engineering and Technology Week

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what level of support he is proposing for next year's science engineering and technology week—SET 95.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The office of science and technology has allocated a total of £195,000 in support of the 1995 national week of science, engineering and technology. Over and above this, colleagues and officials will be making strong personal contributions to the success of the week. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has written to the chairmen of leading companies to encourage participation in the week. I have written to every member of Parliament on similar lines, and have been very gratified by the huge response from them and other Ministers.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: In my speech to the emerging technology showcase on 4 January, I announced the launch of the G-MAIL electronic mail service via the Internet.

By exploiting the economies of scale afforded by the Government telephone network and the joint academic network, G-MAIL will allow electronic communications leading to clear efficiency benefits and reduced paper handling and waiting times.

It is my intention to take advantage of these facilities as soon as practicable. G-MAIL will complement the existing use of electronic mail made by my office via connections to the internal OPSS electronic mail network, facilitating electronic communication within my Department.

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to make available the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in electronic format.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: HMSO has plans to publish the complete statute law of Great Britain, in collaboration with the Statutory Publications Office, in various electronic formats, probably next year.

Meanwhile, HMSO is arranging to publish summary details of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 via Internet this month.

Secondments

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the amount of secondment and other interaction at all levels between the research councils, industry and Government.

Mr. David Hunt: As set out in the 1993 White Paper, "Realising Our Potential", each of the research councils, has set in place a mechanism to increase the level of senior staff exchange and secondment between research councils, industry and Government. To date, 83 people have been, or are, on secondment from the research councils to industry and the Government: 51 people have been, or are on secondment into the research councils.

Science Research Councils

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what the director general of the Science Research Councils has done to achieve each of the objectives as listed on pages 19 and 20 of the Cm 2250 "Realising our Potential";

(2) what is the age of the present director general of the Science Research Councils; and when he is due to retire;

(3) whether the post of director general of the Science Research Councils is classified full time or part time;

(4) what has been the average hours per week actually worked by the current director general of the Science Research Councils since his appointment in January 1994;

(5) on what basis the element, of the director general of the Science Research Councils' remuneration which is performance related will be calculated.

Mr. David Hunt: Since taking up his appointment on 1 January 1994, the director general of Research Councils has: advised on the allocation of the 1994–95 science budget, which introduced new "Realising Our Potential" awards and industrial co-operative awards in science and engineering studentships as instruments for getting the academic research community better connected with their industrial users; taken part in the selection procedures for the chief executives of the new research councils and advised on the appointment of chairmen and members; agreed a set of 1994–95 work objectives for the chief executives of the new research councils; overseen the negotiations on the large hadron collider project at CERN, whose outcome was an agreement to proceed on the basis of a realistic, fair and sustainable financial framework; brought forward proposals for handling large international subscriptions within the science budget as a whole; overseen a review which resulted in agreement on the independent future status and operation of the Daresbury and Rutherford Appleton laboratories; overseen the consultation and advised on the reform of postgraduate education and training supported by the research councils, with the consequent proposal to pilot a number of self-standing research master's courses; advised on the issue of a policy statement which confirmed that the scientific assessment of applications for research council grants would continue to be made by peer reviewers who are expert and acknowledged as such by their peers; conducted an in-depth review of the programmes of the six research councils which, in addition to regular exchanges with the chairmen and chief executives of the research councils, has entailed some 20 visits to universities and research council institutes and centres, over 70 presentations and discussions with some 260 scientists and users of their scientific output and which will inform the director general's advice to me on the allocation of the 1995–96 science budget; advised on the health and funding needs of the science base, so contributing to the recent public expenditure surrey settlement which I secured; and taken part, as a member, in the work of the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and for Wales, the science and engineering base co-ordinating committee, the technology foresight steering group and the governing body of the European Union joint research centre.

Sir John Cadogan was appointed to the post of director general of Research Councils in January 1994 for a three-year period in the first instance. He is aged 64. The post is full-time. The performance-related element of Sir John Cadogan's pay will be determined by the extent to which he has met the objectives of the post.

TREASURY

Welsh Whisky

Dr. Marek: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to introduce legislative changes in anticipation of the distillation of Welsh whisky in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Customs and Excise does not propose to introduce any legislative changes in anticipation of the distillation of Welsh whisky in Wales.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the duration of the trips undertaken by Ministers in his Department which were referred to in his answer of 2 November, *Official Report* column *1215* and on which they were accompanied by their spouses and paid for at public expense.

Mr. Nelson: The information is as follows:

Informal ECONFIN 7–9 April 1994 (3 days)
G7 Summit 8–10 July 1994 (3 days)
Informal ECOFIN 9–11 September 1994 (3 days)

Bank of England Trade Weights

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish a table showing the combined trade weights used in the Bank of England sterling index for EEC currencies and non-EEC currencies together with the average weighted average rate of exchange in each case for each year and each quarter since 1975.

Mr. Nelson: The composition of the exchange rate index is described in the November 1988 issue of the Bank of England quarterly bulletin, a copy of which can be found in the Library. Table 7.1A of "Financial Statistics" provides monthly data on ERI rates. This is available on the Central Statistical Office's database, which can be accessed through the Library.

Personal Equity Plan Holdings

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how personal equity plan holdings and investments have expanded in each year since the introduction of personal equity plans; how personal equity plan holdings are classified in official returns on share ownerships; and what percentage of personal shareholdings he estimates are held in the form of personal equity plans.

Sir George Young: The value of funds held in personal equity plans is shown in the table. This information is derived from returns made by PEP managers.

As at	*Value of funds £ million* *General*	*Single company*	*Total*
December 1987	440	—	440
December 1988	720	—	720
April 1990	2,600	—	2,600
April 1991	4,520	—	4,520

As at	Value of funds £ million General	Single company	Total
April 1992	6,700	270	6,970
April 1993	11,100	790	11,890
April 1994	18,500	1,300	19,800

In the national accounts, PEPs are classified as part of personal sector holdings of United Kingdom company securities. At the end of 1993, the share register survey, run by the Central Statistical Office, estimated the value of ordinary shares of UK-listed companies held by individuals, including those held in PEPs, at £141 billion. In addition, personal sector holdings of unit trust units were estimated to be £42 billion.

Income Tax

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of income tax revenue was paid by the top *(a)* 1 per cent. *(b)* 5 per cent. and *(c)* 10 per cent. of earners in each year from 1978–79; and what are his future projections.

Sir George Young: The information requested is given in the table. Estimates for 1993–94 onwards are based on projections from the 1992–93 survey of personal incomes.

Shares of total income tax liability[1]

	Top 1 per cent.	Top 5 per cent.	Top 10 per cent.
1978–79	11	24	35
1979–80	10	23	34
1980–81	11	24	35
1981–82	11	25	35
1982–83	12	25	36
1983–84	11	25	36
1984–85	12	26	38
1985–86	13	27	38
1986–87	14	29	39
1987–88	15	30	41
1988–89	15	31	42
1989–90	15	31	42
1990–91	15	32	42
1991–92	16	33	43
1992–93	16	33	44
1993–94[2]	16	33	44
1994–95[2]	16	33	44
1995–96[2]	15	32	44

[1] For years up to and including 1989–90 married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation in 1990–91 husbands and wives are counted separately.
[2] Provisional.

Share Options (Tax)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make profits on company directors' share options taxable.

Sir George Young: Gains realised on the exercise of company directors' share options are already chargeable to income tax, unless the options were granted under a scheme approved by the Inland Revenue. Gains realised on the subsequent sale of shares acquired under option are chargeable to capital gains tax in the normal way, whether the option scheme is approved or not.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the visible balance of trade of Italy and the United Kingdom for each of the most recent three quarters and the corresponding balance in 1992.

Mr. Nelson: Balance of trade data for Italy can be found in the OECD publication, "Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade." UK trade data can be found on the Central Statistical Office's database, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Betts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will indicate which local authority expenditure counted against the public expenditure syndicate control total and the PSBR in 1979; and what changes have subsequently been made to those definitions.

Mr. Aitken: The public expenditure planning total used in 1979 included the expenditure of local authorities, excluding debt interest. The present equivalent, the public expenditure control total, also includes local authority expenditure but including debt interest payments. The present control total, unlike the planning total in 1979, measures local authority expenditure net of VAT refunds and includes the capital value of certain leases. Between 1989 and 1991, the public expenditure survey was conducted using the new planning total, which included central Government support for local authorities rather than local authorities' expenditure.

The definitions of the public expenditure planning and control total and the public sector borrowing requirement are independent. The definitional changes in the public expenditure planning and control total have no implications for the PSBR.

Local authorities are part of the public sector; their expenditure is thus a determinant of the PSBR. This was equally so in 1979.

Government Administration

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the cost of Government administration for each of the past 10 years, in cash and real terms, inclusive of the latest outturn estimate for 1994–95.

Sir George Young: Running costs in cash and real terms, at 1993–94 prices, of civilian departments for 1989–90 to 1994–95 are set out in the table.

	1989–90 outturn £ million	1990–91 outturn £ million	1991–92 outturn £ million	1992–93 outturn £ million	1993–94 outturn £ million	1994–95 estimated outturn £ million
cash	10,900	12,200	13,600	14,600	14,600	15,000
real	13,400	13,800	14,600	15,000	14,600	14,700

The split between administrative costs and programme spending modifies over time; so information for the years prior to 1989–90 could be obtained only on a basis consistent with these figures only at disproportionate cost.

Anti-avoidance Rules

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from registered housing associations regarding the impact of his new anti-avoidance rules on costs and rents.

Sir George Young: A number of representations have been received about the implications of the Chancellor's proposal. None so far have quantified the potential impact on borrowing costs or rent levels.

Growth Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average rate of economic growth of the EEC Six since 1979 and the average in 1964 to 1973.

Mr. Nelson: The average GDP growth of the six EEC members over the two periods was as follows:

Annual percentage growth rates

	1964–1973	*1979–1993*
Belgium	4.7	1.8
Germany	4.2	2.0
France	5.1	1.8
Italy	5.1	2.0
Luxembourg	4.0	3.0
Netherlands	4.9	1.8

Market Testing

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *593*, what was the value of the total contract award to Price Waterhouse and Touche Ross.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* The combined value of the two contracts is between £300,000 and £400,000. To give a more precise answer would breach commercial confidentiality.

Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive a report from the retail prices index advisory committee.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[pursuant to his reply, 15 December 1994, c.788]:* I have decided to accept all the recommendations made by the committee in its report, Cm 2717 and Cm 2716, on the treatment in the RPI of owner-occupiers' housing costs and cars respectively. The reports were presented to the House and published on 15 December 1994. The Central Statistical Office will implement the changes in the RPI for February 1995.

Profit-related Pay Scheme

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the number of companies currently using the profit-related pay scheme and on the safeguards for employees who do not wish to join the scheme.

Sir George Young: Registered tax relieved profit-related pay schemes may apply to both incorporated and unincorporated businesses or parts of a business. As at 30 September 1994, there were 7,773 live PRP schemes registered by the Inland Revenue. To qualify for registration, a scheme must apply to 80 per cent. of the employees within a business, or part. Subject to that requirement, it is for employers to decide the basis on which they introduce a scheme.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Holidays

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals there are to declare a public holiday in Northern Ireland for *(a)* St. Andrew's day and *(b)* St. Patrick's day; and what consultations have taken place with (i) the Roman Catholic church, (ii) the Presbyterian church in Ireland (iii) the Loyal Orange Institution and (iv) the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Sir John Wheeler: There are no proposals to declare a public holiday in Northern Ireland for St. Andrew's day. St. Patrick's day is designated a bank holiday in Northern Ireland under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971. Under the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954, a statutory bank holiday is also a public holiday. No consultations have taken place.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Departments have interdepartmental links which facilitate electronic mail between the various office systems using the CCITT X.400 communications standard. It is the intention to expand communications links to the wider public and private sector during 1995. The will facilitate electronic mail communications between Northern Ireland Departments and Great Britain Departments which have office systems that comply with the CCITT X.400 standard.

School Statistics

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the enrolment at *(a)* Regent House grammar school, Newtownards and *(b)* Comber high school; how many temporary classrooms are at each site; what was the last major capital investment at each school; what proposals there are to provide permanent accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Regent House has an enrolment of 1,620, including 175 in its preparatory department. It has 30 temporary classrooms and the last major capital investment at the school was an extension in 1976. An economic appraisal recommending a further extension and refurbishment of the existing premises has been approved for the school and the south-eastern education and library board is preparing an educational brief with a view to appointing consultants to plan the proposed works.

Comber High has an enrolment of 424. It has 15 temporary classrooms and the last major capital investment at the school was an extension in 1971. In 1991, the south-eastern board decided to plan for a new school on the existing site, but following a sharp decline in the school's enrolment the board is now reassessing the appropriate long-term enrolment for development purposes.

Public Health, Crossmaglen

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received on radio transmission and public health in the Crossmaglen area; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: A number of representations have been made to my right hon. and learned Friend. There is, however, no evidence to suggest a decline in public health in any area of Northern Ireland attributable to radio transmissions.

Arts Councils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present level of co-operation between the Northern Ireland Arts Council and the equivalent bodies in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland; and what proposals there are to improve co-operation with these two bodies.

Mr. Ancram: The chairman and chief executive of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland usually meet their counterparts from the Scottish Arts Council and the other two arts councils in the United Kingdom twice a year to discuss matters of common interest. The chief executives of the arts councils in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and Wales also meet annually.

Officers of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Scottish Arts Council are in frequent contact and co-operate on projects which extend to both territories.

The arts councils of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland hold annual meetings and have appointed a joint committee to explore cross-border initiatives. The two councils fund the Tyrone Guthrie centre and a European affairs officer and plan to appoint an arts co-operation officer.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Sir John Wheeler: Work has already been completed to reprogramme all the telephone switchboards in the Northern Ireland civil service to cope with the changes to the national dialling codes later this year. The cost of this work was minimal as all the private sector suppliers involved carried out the work free of charge. The only Government expenditure, therefore, was a small staffing overhead of approximately £1,500 to plan and co-ordinate the operation.

Updating stationery and reprogramming telephone and fax memories will incur minimal additional costs.

Feed Trials

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what work, other than trials at Loughrey, is being carried out in the United Kingdom to evaluate heat-treated feed against non-heat treated feed in commercial egg layers.

Mr. Ancram: No work of this nature is being carried out by the Government. I am not aware of any work being carried out by other parties.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the Government's policy to give aid to avoid environmental destruction; and what help has been made in this field in the latest year for which figures are available

Mr. Baldry: All activities supported under the aid programme are assessed for environmental impact according to the procedures contained in the ODA's manual of environmental appraisal, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. In 1993–94, the ODA spent £147 million on bilateral projects either wholly or partly concerned with environmental protection.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom ranks among EC member states in the proportion of gross domestic product being allocated for aid.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 25 November 1994, *Official Report* column *426*.

Tibet

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the European Union over the grant to the Chinese Govenment-run Pa Nam rural development project in Tibet, approved by the Asian and Latin Committee of the EU on 19 October 1994.

Mr. Baldry: We are in touch at senior level with the European Commission about our concerns that EC assistance should be used to help only indigenous Tibetans and that the Pa Nam project is not detrimental to the fragile environment in the region. We have made clear that these issues should be addressed, if necessary by amending the financing agreement.

Cambodia

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the projects funded by bilateral aid to Cambodia, including the amount of aid given to each project.

Mr. Baldry: Current projects in Cambodia funded under the United Kingdom country programme, and under the joint funding scheme, are listed:

Country Projects

Project	*Allocation (£000s)*
Battambang Urban Water Project	1,400
Kratie Water Project	343
English by TV and Radio	46
English Language Training	1,930
Strengthening Health Systems Phase II	741
Anti Malaria Project	1,143
Birth Spacing Project	250
Essential Drugs Project	1,000
Programme Aid	2,500
British Partnership Scheme	100
Support for Cambodia Mine Action Centre	1,136
Social Marketing of Contraceptives	150

NGO Projects

Agency	*Project name*	*Allocation £*
ADD	Development Programme	302,894
Cambodia Trust	Prosthetics Clinic and Workshop—Kompong Som	249,741
Christian Outreach	Agricultural, Business and Community Development	336,671
Christian Outreach	Preventative Health Care	288,238
Concern	Chuk Saw Forestry programme	133,938
Concern	Primary Education Programme	326,166
Concern	Primary Health Care Programme	65,359
Food for the Hungry	Rural Water Supply	91,830
Health Unlimited	Integrated Health Care	236,404
Health Unlimited	Primary Health Care	383,288
Helpage	Opthalmic Services	177,393
Helpage	Resettlement and Rehabilitation Programme	118,200
Oxfam	Community Development Support Programme	15,980
Oxfam	Rural Development Programme	2,894
Oxfam	Re-establishment of Local Support Structures	5,389
Southeast Asian Outreach	Scale Project	229,960
World Vision	Kompong Tralach Rural Health	95,895
World Vision	Rattanak Mondol: Rural Health Project	168,129

Indonesia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what was the cost of the original aid for trade element in the Cikampek-Padalarang toll road, Indonesia, *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as proportion of the total estimated costs; what payments were ultimately made; and what proportion of the total outturn cost they represented;

(2) when the release of aid for trade funds for the Cikampek-Padalarang toll road, Indonesia, was agreed; and when the project was *(a)* commenced and *(b)* completed.

Mr. Baldry: In 1988, the Government agreed to provide £16.85 million—30.1 per cent. of the officially supported package—towards the cost of constructing the Cikampek-Padalarang toll road, Indonesia. Of this, £4.7 million has been spent on surveys, detailed design and geological investigations. The remainder will be provided as a mixed credit towards the cost of construction.

Project negotiations are continuing and are not expected to be completed until April next year. The total costs will not be known until the project has been completed. Nevertheless, the total of official support for the project will not exceed £16.85 million.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *373–74*, if he will indicate whether the aid and trade project in Indonesia was approved alongside any other ATP projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The Bandung TV studio project was approved in January 1986 alongside a project to supply new radio equipment for the central radio studios in Jakarta to replace equipment lost in a fire which severely disrupted national radio programmes. The ODA considered that there was a sound developmental case for the provision of aid in support of the radio studio equipment project. The two projects have been pursued separately since October 1986.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *373–74*, if he will give the date that an appraisal was carried out on the Indonesian television studio project; and if he will publish the results of the appraisal in full.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Consideration and approval of the project was based upon a number of reports from ODA and DTI staff and consultants following visits to Indonesia during 1985 and early 1986. In line with established policy, the ODA does not publish its projects appraisals.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report* columns *373–74*, if he will outline the main aims and objectives of the aid and trade provision project in Indonesia and indicate what factors led the ODA to consider that it might fall outside the scope of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980 in the light of the High Court judgment on Pergau.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The main aims and objectives of the project were to supply equipment to the Indonesian television authority for a new television studio complex constructed at Bandung to assist the service in producing programmes. The factors which led ODA to consider that, in the light of the court's judgment, the project fell outside the scope of the Act were concerns about the developmental soundness of the project and the weight attached to commercial and political considerations in the decision to allocate aid.

Ankara Metro Project

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the decision was taken to give support to the Ankara metro project under the aid and trade provision scheme.

Mr. Baldry: On 10 September 1990.

Crown Agents

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what other companies or organisations were considered when KPMG Corporate Finance was appointed to advise on the Crown Agents privatisation; what were the procedures for comparison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The competition for this contract was conducted in compliance with the European Commission directive on contracting for services under negotiated procedures. Subsequent to the notice in the supplement to the *Official Journal* of the European Communities on 16 September, proposals were received from Coopers and Lybrand International, Ernst and Young, Samuel Montagu Company Limited and Touche Ross Corporate Finance as well as KPMG Corporate Finance.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the cost of the contract awarded to KPMG Corporate Finance to advise on the transfer of the Crown Agents to the private sector.

Mr. Baldry: For services currently under contract, £90,000.

Consultants

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the outside consultants appointed by him to advise on overseas development matters in each year since 1984, the total cost in each case, the consultant contracts which are currently under way and the total cost of all current contracts.

Mr. Baldry: Information on contracts awarded prior to 1992–93 is not centrally recorded and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. For the years 1992–93 and 1993–94, I refer to my written answer to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 2 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1182*.

Good Government

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what considerations were given to the criterion of good government in decisions regarding the allocation of £34.8 million to Indonesia and £33.7 million of aid to China in 1993–94; what proportion each represents of United Kingdom bilateral aid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Decisions on aid allocations to individual countries take account of a number of criteria. These include poverty, good government issues, including respect for human rights, and the commitment of the country to appropriate economic policies, and other important development objectives such as protection of the environment. The effectiveness with which United Kingdom aid is used is also an important criterion. Aid for Indonesia and China represented 2.7 per cent. and 2.6 per cent. respectively of total bilateral aid in 1993–94.

Pergau Dam

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *773–74*, on the Pergau dam, if he will set out in detail the grounds on which each of the aid and trade provision projects in *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Botswana and *(c)* Indonesia raised legal difficulties following the High Court judgment.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* I refer the hon. member to the replies I gave the hon. member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) today.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *773–74*, on the Pergau dam, if he will set out the criteria used by the ODA to determine which aid and trade provision projects did not comply with the High Court judgment on Pergau.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The ODA, in co-operation with the National Audit Office, examined all current aid and trade provision soft loan and mixed credit projects to determine whether an appropriate test of developmental soundness was taken into account in each case, whether the projects on which payments are currently being made meet the relevant developmental test and whether the decision-making process gave sufficient prominence to developmental factors, while taking account of other factors such as political and commercial interests

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *773–74*, on the Pergau dam, what legal advice was sought by the ODA in regard to the provision of aid and trade provision funds for the projects in *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Botswana and *(c)* Indonesia.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* No legal advice was sought on the provision of aid for these projects. However, in each case legal advice was sought on the detailed terms of each of the commercial contracts and the bilateral agreements with the Governments concerned covering the provision of aid.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report*, columns *773–74*, on the Pergau dam, what were the key political and commercial consideration as taken into account prior to the approval of the ATP funds for *(a)* Indonesia, *(b)* Botswana and *(c)* Turkey.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The key commercial considerations in each case were the potential loss of both the immediate and follow-on business in the sectors concerned in these countries and the surrounding regions. In the case of Botswana, the key political consideration was our wish to help Botswana as one of the front line states to reduce its dependence on South Africa. In the case of Turkey, political

considerations took account of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the previous month and Turkey's positive stance following the invasion. In the case of Indonesia, the key political considerations were Indonesia's position in the Association of South-East Asian Nations region and the need to demonstrate Britain's commitment to the country and its development through a project which was earmarked for a United Kingdom supplier.

Botswana

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report,* columns *373–74,* if he will outline the main aims and objectives of the aid and trade provision project in Botswana and indicate what factors led the ODA to consider, following the High Court judgment, that it might fall outside the scope of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The main aim and objective of the project was to provide Botswana with its own flight information system to ensure awareness of flights from neighbouring countries. The project was therefore consistent with our overall policy of assisting front line states to reduce their dependence on South Africa and was judged to be a cost-effective means of meeting the objective. The factors which led ODA to consider that, in the light of the court's judgment, the project fell outside the scope of the Act were concerns about the developmental soundness of the project and the weight attached to commercial and political considerations in the decision to allocate aid.

Turkey

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral statement of 13 December, *Official Report,* columns *373–74,* if he will outline the main aims and objectives of the aid and trade provision project in Turkey and indicate what factors led the ODA to consider, following the High Court judgment, that it might fall outside the scope of the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act 1980.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The main aims and objectives of the project are to build the first stage of the metro system in the city of Ankara to reduce chronic road congestion and pollution. The factors which led ODA to consider that, in the light of the court's judgment, the project fell outside the scope of the Act were concerns about the developmental soundness of the project and the weight attached to commercial and political considerations in the decision to allocate aid.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Intelligence and Security Committee

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what is the annual expenditure earmarked for the Intelligence and Security Committee;

(2) if he expects to give oral evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee;

(3) if senior staff below the level of director general in the security services are to be allowed to give evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee if the committee requests this;

(4) at what time of the year he expects to receive the first report from the Intelligence and Security Committee;

(5) if officers of the House are involved in staffing the Intelligence and Security Committee.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 21 November 1994, *Official Report,* column *25.*

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what considerations underlay the decision to hold meetings of the Intelligence and Security Committee in the Cabinet Office; what consideration was given to holding them in the House; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The House has always recognised that intelligence issues cannot be dealt with in the same way as normal departmental affairs. Special arrangements have been made therefore for the committee to meet in suitable secure accommodation in the Cabinet Office, reflecting the necessary secrecy of the committee's proceedings.

European Parliament

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy not to agree to any proposal which would extend or increase the powers of the European Parliament.

The Prime Minister: The treaty on European Union accorded the European Parliament new powers. We do not believe that the case has been made for an extension of these powers. The primary democratic focus in the European Union rests with national Parliaments, not the European Parliament.

Hunting Engineering

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown of all ongoing Government contracts with Hunting Engineering and those completed in the last two years, summarising the amounts relating to each purpose within the contracts and the total of them overall.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Voter Satisfaction Surveys

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what surveys Her Majesty's Government carried out in 1994 to assess voter satisfaction with Her Majesty's Government's policy; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will propose action to increase the numbers of people aged 16 to 20 years employed in each Department and associated agencies;

(2) if he will give an estimate of the numbers of people available for work aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17, *(c)* 18, *(d)* 19 and *(e)* 20 years; and if he will compare their ratio to all employees with the ratio of young people employed across the public services and agencies.

The Prime Minister: Government Departments and agencies recruit staff on merit through fair and open competition. The details of recruitment procedures are determined by each Department or agency in the light of its own needs and circumstances.

The Employment Department aims to integrate young people into the labour market by providing a wide range of employment and training measures and services for them. Government Departments and agencies participate fully in programmes such as youth training.

The employment of young people in different occupations or sectors of activity is affected by recent recruitment levels and by the qualities and experience appropriate to the work.

In particular, young people tend to group towards particular occupations, some of which may not be associated with the public sector.

The available estimates from the labour force survey for Great Britain in summer—June to August—1994 show that there were 1,597,000 16 to 20-year-old employees in total, representing 7 per cent. of all employees. Of these 119,000 were in the public sector, representing 2 per cent. of all public sector employees. A further 507,000 16 to 20-year-olds were classified as International Labour Organisation unemployed of which 157,000 were in full-time education but actively seeking a part-time or vacation job.

Political Resolutions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what are his political resolutions for 1995.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Queen's Speech, *Official Report*, 16 November 1994 columns *4–6*.

European Councils

Dr. Marek: To ask the Prime Minister what changes he proposes to make in reporting to Parliament proceedings and debates within European Council meetings and committees; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Ministers give Parliament an account of each meeting of the Council of Ministers. Press releases, which include details of voting, are deposited in the Library of the House. I see no reason to change these arrangements.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library his correspondence with Mr. Martin Cadman, of the Lockerbie victims' relatives association, and in particular his response to Mr. Cadman's letter of 18 December 1994, concerning Lord Parkinson's meetings on 19 September 1989 and 5 December 1989 with the relatives, and his answer of 15 December, *Official Report*, column *1068*.

The Prime Minister: No, it is not my normal practice to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of his response to Lockerbie victim relative Rev. John Mosey's letter to him of 28 December 1994.

The Prime Minister: No, it is not my normal practice to do so.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if, following communications from Mr. Martin Cadman, Pamela Dix, Rev. John Mosey and Dr. Jim Swire, relatives of Lockerbie victims, he has anything to add to his oral answer to the hon. Member of Linlithgow of 15 December, *Official Report*, column 1068.

The Prime Minister: I understand that the meeting between Lord Parkinson and a group of British relatives of the Lockerbie victims to which I referred in my reply to the hon. Gentleman on 15 December took place in December 1989, not in 1990. At that meeting, Lord Parkinson explained the Government's decision not to hold a confidential inquiry into the disaster, but said that the Lord Advocate was likely to hold a public fatal accident inquiry. I have received representations from several relatives of Lockerbie victims calling for a further inquiry. However, in view of all the investigations that have already been carried out, and the need to avoid the danger of prejudicing a criminal trial of the two accused, I do not believe such an inquiry is warranted.

Ghazanfer Ali

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the latest position in the case of Mr. Ghazanfer Ali, detained in Mirpur prison in Azad Kashmir.

The Prime Minister: We continue to raise our concerns over the delays in the hearings of the charges facing Ghazanfer Ali. There has been no progress since my previous answer. The hearings continue to be adjourned.

Scottish Devolution

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to conduct an analysis of the effects on the rest of the United Kingdom of devolution for Scotland as proposed in the Scotland Act 1978; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The proposals for a Scottish assembly contained within the Scotland Act 1978 were the subject of a referendum in 1979 and failed to gain the support of the electorate. The proposals of the Scotland Act 1978 no longer enjoy the support of any political party, but the inconsistencies inherent in those proposals, which were clearly highlighted over 15 years ago, remain today unanswered by the proponents of devolution.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mortgage Protection Policies

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has as to the extent to which the eligibility criteria for mortgage protection policies tend to exclude the self-employed.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: It is possible for the self-employed to safeguard themselves against sickness or disability through mortgage protection policies. The circumstances under which income replacement is payable varies between different insurers—insurers would normally require evidence that trading has permanently ceased. Insurers are considering how they can best meet the needs of the self-employed and others, consistent with sound underwriting practice, following the announcement of the proposed changes in income support for mortgage interest.

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will enter into negotiations with the insurance market concerning private mortgage protection policies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Officials have already held discussions with the Association of British Insurers about mortgage protection policies. Department of Social Security Ministers will also be meeting the ABI as part of the consultation process on the proposed changes in income support for mortgage interest payments.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *299*, if he will name the United Kingdom company that is licensed to explore for oil and gas in the East Timor gap.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The company is Enterprise Oil plc operating through two wholly owned subsidiaries, Enterprise Oil Timor Gap (9) Ltd. and Enterprise Oil Timor Gap (14) Ltd. of Perth Australia.

Radioactive Materials

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *253*, which radioactive materials are licensed for disposal down the Dorset outfalls; in what quantities material has been passed down the Dorset by outfalls; and what monitoring is carried out and by whom of the results of such disposal adjacent to the site of the outfalls.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for the board of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Export Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list export credits project business for *(a)* Iran, *(b)* Iraq, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Saudi Arabia, *(e)* the United Arab Emirates and *(f)* Egypt since 1980–81.

Mr. Needham: The value of liabilities assumed in each of the named markets over the period was as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Iran*	*Iraq*	*Jordan*	*Saudi Arabia*	*UAE*	*Egypt*
1980–81	0	0	188	0	0	25
1981–82	0	129	42	19	0	58
1982–83	0	352	1	58	96	77
1983–84	0	22	26	12	0	42
1984–85	0	163	18	27	0	157
1985–86	0	293	0	52	1	35
1986–87	20	145	240	0	0	202
1987–88	0	239	103	15	33	118
1988–89	0	245	152	450	0	5
1989–90	0	374	41	0	188	111
1990–91	2	90	0	0	0	21
1991–92	0	0	0	17	0	58
1992–93	0	0	14	225	356	12
1993–94	7	0	0	751	0	0

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will costs his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Ian Taylor: There will be very little additional cost to the Department arising from the national dialling code changes. Service providers such as BT and Mercury have not charged for the necessary work within telephone exchanges and the costs of consequential internal changes to stationery, fax machines and soon will be contained within existing expenditure limits. Forward planning has enabled these changes to be introduced progressively thereby minimising the additional costs involved.

The Department recommends that all telephone users plan ahead for the change in dialling codes which come into effect on 16 April 1995.

Post Office

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the Post Office's external finance limit for each year since 1979; and what are the projected figures for future planned years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Post Office's actual and planned external finance limits since 1979 are as follows:

	£ Million Actual
1979–80	–34.0
1980–81	–7.7
1981–82	–13.4
1982–83	–59.7
1983–84	–61.5
1984–85	–99.5
1985–86	–74.7
1986–87	–93.1
1987–88	–80.0
1988–89	–102.0
1989–90	–101.9
1990–91	nil
1991–92	–74
1992–93	–80
1993–94	–182

Advisory Committees

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the programme of work for *(a)* the Advisory Committee for Arbitration Law, *(b)* the Aviation Committee, *(c)* the Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property and *(d)* the Fuel Cell Advisory Panel.

Mr. Heseltine: The information requested is as follows:

a) Advisory Committee for Arbitration Law

The current work of the advisory committee is set out in my answer to the hon. Gentleman of 27 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *779*.

b) Aviation Committee

The committee meets four times a year. Each meeting focuses on the policy background of several specific subjects within the topics of the standing agenda, detailed below:

a) The performance and competitiveness of the United Kingdom aerospace industry;
b) A strategy for the industry;
c) Research and technology acquisition;
d) The launch aid scheme;
e) Future opportunities for United Kingdom companies—including market forecasts;
f) Support for United Kingdom aerospace exports;
g) Collaboration policy;
h) MOD procurement policies;
i) Air traffic management.

c) Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property

The committee gives advice to my Department on issues such as the fees and implementing rules for the Community trade mark, the draft rules for the international registration of trade marks—Madrid protocol—United Kingdom Patent Office searching policy, the Commission proposal for a block exemption for patent licences, the use and exploitation of intellectual property by small firms and the proposed European directive and regulation on design protection.

d) Fuel Cell Advisory Panel

The FCAP advises my Department and the energy technology support unit on the management of the Department's advanced fuel cell R and D programme. It advises on the development of plans to meet the aims and objectives set by my Department for the programme, monitors progress and evaluates its effectiveness. It also advises on the merits and funding of individual project proposals.

There is no set programme of work for the panel but it meets as necessary, abut four times a year, to undertake these functions. Technical strategies for the programme, endorsed by the panel, were published earlier this year and are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Government's response to each submission from the Aviation Committee listed in his answer of 26 October, *Official Report*, columns *649–50*.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's response to each submission from the Aviation Committee was as follows:

Control Technology Programme: It was agreed to offer financial support to this programme from the civil aircraft research and demonstration budget.

National Strategic Technology Acquisition Plan: On 20 July 1993, the right hon. Tim Sainsbury, MP, Minister for Industry, announced that the DTI would adopt the technological priorities identified in the NSTAP. They are being used to inform DTI's work in the design of its own aerospace policies and in its discussions with the providers of other publicly funded science and technology programmes in Whitehall and Europe. DTI is working with industry, other Government Departments and the science and engineering base to identify ways of helping the aeronautics industry meet its priority needs under the Government's science, engineering and technology policy, also encompassing the European dimension, with the NSTAP priorities serving to inform the Government during discussions on the size and content of the European Union's fourth research and development framework programme.

Technology Co-ordinators: It has been agreed that technology co-ordinators should be appointed to implement the NSTAP with the cost being shared between Government and industry.

An Industry Strategy: The Government welcome the work done by the Society of British Aerospace Companies in developing the strategy document. It has been adopted as the basis of a dialogue between Government and the industry on the competitiveness of the sector and represents a good foundation for the stronger partnership between Government and the industry that both wish to develop.

The Hercules Replacement: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced the Government's policy to the House on 16 December 1994, *Official Report* column *823*.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Government's response to each submission from the Measurement Advisory Committee listed in his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, columns *936–38*.

Mr. Ian Taylor: In response to the submission from the Standards, Quality and Measurement Advisory Committee of 19 February 1993, the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), replied to the chairman of the SQMAC by letter on 26 March 1993. Copies of this letter were sent to all the SQMAC members who wrote to my hon. Friend on an individual basis.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade replied in a letter to the SQMAC submission of 1 June 1993, offering a meeting which was held on 13 July 1993 between the chairman and representative members of the SQMAC and the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin).

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the policies and legislation initiated over the past three years that were based on proposals from *(a)* the Aviation Committee, *(b)* the Advisory Committee for Arbitration Law, *(c)* the Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property, *(d)* the Measurement

Advisory Committee and *(e)* the Fuel Cell Advisory Panel.

Mr. Heseltine: The information requested is as follows:

a) Aviation Committee

My Department has adopted the technology priorities set out in the national strategic technology acquisition plan for aeronautics prepared by the committee. The Department has also agreed to support the appointment of technology co-ordinators, a mechanism to help implement NSTAP recommended by the working group which consisted of industry members nominated by the Aviation Committee and officials.

b) Advisory Committee for Arbitration Law

As indicated in my answer of 26 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *649*, my Department issued a consultation document on a draft Arbitration Bill. This was based on advice from the advisory committee.

c) Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property SACIP has provided advice to my Department on a wide range of issues and made proposals leading to the development of the Trade Marks Act, the trade marks rules, the Community trade mark regulation, draft rules for the international registration of trade marks—Madrid Protocol—the trade mark law harmonisation treaty, the draft directive on the legal protection of Biological inventions, supplementary protection certificates for pharmaceuticals, proposals for second tier protection, the draft treaty on the international registration of industrial designs, and the council regulation on counterfeiting.

d) Measurement Advisory Committee (MAC)

The MAC and its predecessor, the Standards, Quality and Measurement Advisory Committee, have given general advice on the size, apportionment and management of spending on the national measurement system. Its working groups have helped to produce, monitor and review 12 programmes of work within the NMS.

e) Fuel Cell Advisory Panel

The terms of reference for the Fuel Cell Advisory Panel do not include the development of new policy or legislative proposals.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the programme of work for the Measurement Advisory Committee.

Mr. Ian Taylor: A full meeting of the Measurement Advisory Committee is scheduled for 27 March 1995 and will discuss a range of issues within the advisory committee's terms of reference. A meeting of the independent members of the advisory committee will be held in September or October 1995—date to be arranged—to carry out the annual task of prioritising all of the work within the 12 national measurement system programmes.

In addition, there is likely to be 22 meetings of the advisory committee's working groups during 1995. The working groups will review the progress of work within each of the 12 NMS programmes. Each working group is chaired by an independent member of the advisory committee.

Economic Development

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all economic development organisations and groups in the south-west region.

Mr. Eggar: The best source of this information is the list used by Devon and Cornwall Business Link as a directory of organisations which provide economic and business support and advice. The Government office for Devon and Cornwall is also providing a range of services to Devon and Cornwall from temporary offices in the centre of Plymouth.

Economic organisations and groups in Devon and Cornwall

Organisation	*Organisation*
A R Training Services	Key Information (Devon Library)
Action Consultants Training	Law Society—Lawyers For Your Business
ADAS Consultancy	Lloyds Bank
Agricultural Development (ADAS)	Mid Cornwall Business Associates Ltd
Barclays Bank	Mid Devon District Council
Barnstaple Chamber of Commerce	Mid Devon Enterprise Agency
Bowes Associates	Midland Bank
British Red Cross	Ministry of Agriculture
Business Advisory Service D and C Tec	National Westminster Bank
Business Enterprise Exeter	North Cornwall District Council
Business Information Centre	North Cornwall Sport and Recreation Council
CSM Associates Limited	North Devon College Enterprise Unit
Caradon Business Centre	North Devon District Council
Caradon District Council	North Devon Enterprise Agency
Carrick District Council	North Devon Manufacturers Association
Commercial Education Training (CETS)	Payback Environmental Business Association
Cornwall Chamber for Industry	Penwith District Council
Cornwall College	PEP Business School Management Centre
Cornwall County Council	PEP Research and Consultancy Ltd
Cornwall Economic Development Office	Plymouth Area Groundwork Trust
Cornwall Enterprise Board	Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
Cornwall Innovation Centre	Plymouth College of Further Education
Cornwall Library Service	Plymouth Training for Commerce
Cornwall Rural Community Council	Red Cross
Cornwall Tourist Board	Restormel Borough Council
Cornwall Trust for Nature Conservation	Restormel Enterprise Trust
Countryside Commission	Royal Bank of Scotland
Dartmouth Enterprise Group	Royal British Legion
Devon and Cornwall Tap	Rural Development Commission
Devon Co-operative Agency Ltd	Saltash College
Devon County Council	South Devon Export Group
Devon and Cornwall Development International	South Hams Agency for Rural Enterprise
Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council	South Hams District Council
Down to Earth Training	South West Productivity
Duchy College	St Austell College
East Devon District Council	St Johns Ambulance
East Devon Small Industries Group	Teignbridge District Council
English Nature	Teignbridge Enterprise Agency
Enterprise Plymouth Limited	Torbay Borough Council
Enterprise Tamar Limited	Torbay Enterprise Agency
European Information Centre	Torridge District Council
Exeter City Council	Trevint Limited
Exeter Enterprises Limited	Trustee Savings Bank
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group	West Cornwall Enterprise Trust
Finatlantic	West Country Development Company
Focus Europe South West	West Country Tourist Board
Government Office for the South West	West Devon District Council
Incorporated Society of Advertisers	West Penwith Council
Kerrier District Council	

Arms Sales

Miss Lestor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many items of correspondence his Department has received from the public since 1 September on export credit cover relating to arms sales.

Mr. Needham: Over the period the Export Credits Guarantee Department has received approximately 2,300 items of correspondence on the subject, nearly all in leaflet form.

Overseas Debt

Miss Lestor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list by country and for each year since 1984 the total outstanding Export Credits Guarantee Department debt owed to the United Kingdom by developing countries, excluding eastern Europe.

Mr. Needham: To provide year-by-year figures would entail disproportionate cost. For the figures of outstanding rescheduled debt as at 31 October 1994 I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her by the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1083–84*.

Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom share of imports into each of the other EEC countries in *(a)* the latest quarter for which figures are available and *(b)* the corresponding quarter of 1992.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is given in the table.

UK Share of EU Countries Visible Imports (per cent. terms)

	Year	*Latest Quarter*	*Corresponding Quarter of 1992*
Belgium/Luxembourg	Q4 1993	9.0	7.3
Denmark	Q4 1992	7.9	[1]n/a
France	Q2 1994	7.7	7.6
Germany	Q2 1994	6.2	6.7
Greece	Q4 1993	5.8	5.3
Ireland	Q3 1993	37.3	43.8
Italy	Q2 1994	6.2	5.8
Netherlands	Q1 1994	8.4	8.9
Portugal	Q2 1994	6.3	6.9
Spain	Q2 1994	7.8	7.4

Note:
[1]Denmark data for Q4 1992 is the latest available.
Source: OECD Series A.

Audits

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he intends to take against the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales for failure to keep a proper register of individuals eligible to conduct audits; and what inquiries he intends to initiate to investiage the performance of the regulatory bodies in this respect.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Companies Act 1989 (Register of Auditors and Information about Audit Firms) Regulations 1991 require the recognised supervisory bodies for company auditors, of which the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales is one, to take reasonable care to keep and maintain a register of the individuals and firms eligible for appointment as company auditor. The regulations are made pursuant to sections 35 and 36 of the Companies Act 1989.

It has been alleged that the ICAEW may have failed to meet these requirements in its handling of one case last year. My Department has sought an explanation from the ICAEW and I will write to the hon. Member once I have considered that response and made any further inquiries which may be appropriate.

Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the change in *(a)* the average capital employed in manufacturing and *(b)* the capital employed in other non-North sea industrial and commercial companies between 1990 and 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Figures on average capital employed at current replacement cost by manufacturing industrial and commercial companies are published in the Central Statistical Office "First Release", CSO(94) 205—"Profitability of UK companies: rates of return of UK industrial and commercial companies (1962–1993)". Figures on average capital employed in other non-North sea industrial and commercial companies are available by subtracting the manufacturing figures from those of non-North sea industrial and commercial companies which are also published in "First Release". A copy of "First Release" is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average annual rate of growth in manufacturing output in 1973 to 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Between 1973 and 1993 the average annual growth in manufacturing output was 0.03 per cent.

Transport Equipment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will list in the *Official Report* the periods since 1964 in which output of transport equipment remained 12 per cent. below its previous peak after five years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. This information is not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the United Kingdom tourist areas which qualify for assisted status and the cost of that assistance to the taxpayer in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The assisted areas are defined in terms of travel-to-work areas, most of which include a range of economic activity. There is no list of tourist areas on which the cost of assistance could be assessed.

Non-fossil Fuel Quota

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy that non-fossil fuel electricity capacity contracted delivered with a provision for annual interruptions on less than *(a)* 20, *(b)* 15 or *(c)* 10 occasions per annum shall count towards the non-fossil fuel quota.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's policy is to use the non-fossil fuel obligation as an instrument to assist promising renewable electricity generation technologies to enter the commercial electricity generation market. Competition in the allocation of contracts is an essential part of this process.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the legal processes covering compensation for multiple or sequentially linked accidents on the same nuclear site.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Under United Kingdom law, where third party damage or injury is caused as a result of a single nuclear occurrence at a site, compensation is payable by the site operator up to his insurance limit of £140 million. Further compensation up to an overall limit of approximately £280 million for each occurrence is payable out of money provided by Parliament. This will also cover a case where the £140 million insurance may be exhausted because there has been a previous occurrence at the same site within the same insurance cover period.

However, following any occurrence resulting in claims on the operator's insurance, the Minister, if he thinks it proper to do so, may direct the operator to open a new cover period for that site, so that a further £140 million will be available for any subsequent incident. If claims exceed £280 million, additional compensation may be provided by Parliament to the extent that it shall determine.

A succession of occurrences at one site, which is attributable to a particular event or to the carrying out of a particular operation, is regarded as a single occurrence for the payment of compensation. The whole of a continuing occurrence is similarly regarded as a single occurrence.

EU Trade Deficit

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the EU's deficit in trade with the rest of the world *(a)* in the current year, *(b)* in the previous year and *(c)* five years ago; and what assessment he has made of these figures.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is given in the table.

EU(12) balance of visible trade with the rest of the world

	$ Million
1988	–29,541
1992	–67,525
1993	–3,967

Source:
Eurostat External Trade.

My Department is continuously monitoring the UK and EU trade position with the rest of the world.

Cable Franchises

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much was paid for each of the cable franchises and local delivery licences awarded since 1983.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Precise details of how much was paid for each of the cable franchises and local delivery franchises cannot be provided other than at disproportionate cost.

Applicants for the 126 franchises awarded under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 were charged an application fee and an annual licence fee based on a scale related to the size of the franchise. Under the Broadcasting Act 1990 franchises are awarded by competitive tender. In addition to an application fee, successful applicants make tender payments: an initial cash bid payable in the first year and indexed for inflation in each succeeding year. A percentage of qualifying revenue is also payable over the duration of the licence.

Franchisees are also required to pay a fee for Telecommunications Act licence and an annual renewal fee. These are revised annually.

Waste Management

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he still supports the hierarchy of waste management options including reduction, re-use, recycling, including materials recycling, composting and energy recovery, which was set out in the joint response by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment to the second report of the House of Commons Environment Select Committee published in November 1994, Cm 2696.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's policy on a waste management hierarchy is set out in paragraphs 23.14 to 23.17 of "Sustainable Development—the UK Strategy", published in January 1994.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Telephone Calls

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how much has been spent on telephone charges for parliamentary purposes; and how many telephone calls have been made for parliamentary purposes in each of the last five years.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply. For technical reasons it is not possible to identify the number of calls

made. However, call charges in each of the last five years for the Palace of Westminster are as follows:

1989: £561,000
1990: £570,000
1991: £690,000
1992: £599,000
1993: £497,000

The hon. Member will wish to note that since 1991 there has been a significant reduction in the overall cost of telephone calls due to the increased competition from telephone network companies, and to the introduction of the least cost routing system which ensures calls are directed by the cheapest means.

Parliamentary Mail

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how much has been spent on postage charges for parliamentary purposes; and how many items have been posted for parliamentary purposes in each of the last five years.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply. Postage charges incurred by the House of Commons for parliamentary purposes in each of the last five financial years are as follows:

	£
1990–91	1,262,884
1991–92	1,304,419
1992–93	1,455,913
1993–94	1,766,568
1993–94 (1 April–31 October 1994)	1,254,479

It is not possible to provide the hon. Member with details of the number of items posted.

Business and Technology Education Council

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to BTEC to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 20 February to Friday 24 February 1995.

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Disputes

16. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days were lost through industrial disputes *(a)* in 1994 and *(b)* in 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: In the 12 months to October 1994, 403,000 days were lost to strikes in the United Kingdom. This compares with a 1979 total of 29.5 million.

Equal Opportunities Commission

17. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Job Advertisements

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what legislative action is to be taken in respect of job advertisements that discriminate on grounds of age.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government have no intention of introducing age discrimination legislation, which we believe would be ineffective and would increase the burdens imposed on employers. The Government firmly believe that the way forward is through persuasion.

Redundancies, York

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many redundancies have been notified in York in the past 12 months.

Mr. Oppenheim: Latest available figures from the quarterly labour force survey show that in Yorkshire and Humberside in summer 1994 20,000 people were made redundant in the three months prior to interview. This figure is not seasonally adjusted.

Youth Training

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research he has commissioned to establish the proportion of young people aged between 16 and 17 whose training needs are not met by current training opportunities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: The Government are currently considering this issue on a cross-Government basis.

Baggage Handlers

21. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the responsibilities of the Health and Safety Executive in relation to the transfer of baggage at airports.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for enforcing the law relating to the health and safety at work of baggage handlers.

Employment Opportunities

23. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he plans to take to improve the opportunities to gain work for the long-term unemployed.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy).

Unemployment

22. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current level of unemployment in Workington.

Mr. Oppenheim: In November 1994, unadjusted claimant unemployment in the Workington parliamentary constituency stood at 3,482, a fall of 5.9 per cent. over the year.

27. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of unemployment nationally as indicated by the labour force survey; and what is the difference between this and the claimant total issued by his Department.

Mr. Oppenheim: On the seasonally adjusted basis, the summer 1994 labour force survey shows that 2.64 million people were unemployed in Great Britain under the International Labour Organisation definition, while the average claimant count figure over the same period stood at 2.53 million, a difference of 112,000.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what he attributes the fall in unemployment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Portillo: Britain's unemployment has fallen faster than that of any other European country because we have pursued sound economic policies based on permanently low inflation and a deregulated, flexible labour market, combined with active measures to help people back to work.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current rates of unemployment in each EU nation; and what were the figures *(a)* one and *(b)* five years previously.

Mr. Oppenheim: Internationally comparable unemployment rates based on the standardised International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment are published by EUROSTAT in its monthly "Unemployment Bulletin," copies of which are available in the Library. The information requested for each member of the EU as at the end of 1994 is given in the following table:

Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates in EU countries

	Latest month (October 1994)	*Last Year (October 1993)*	*Five Years ago (October 1989)*
Belgium	10.1	9.7	8.2
Denmark	9.8	10.7	7.8
Germany[1]	6.2	6.0	5.3
Greece[2]	—	—	—

Seasonally adjusted unemployment rates in EU countries

	Latest month (October 1994)	*Last Year (October 1993)*	*Five Years ago (October 1989)*
Spain	22.1	22.5	16.7
France	11.3	11.1	9.2
Ireland	17.6	18.4	15.1
Italy	12.1	11.3	10.6
Luxembourg	3.5	2.8	2.0
Netherlands	[3]10.0	9.5	8.3
Portugal	6.1	5.5	4.8
United Kingdom	8.9	10.3	6.9
EC Average	10.7	10.8	8.7

Notes:
[1] No ILO rate available for unified Germany. The above rates are for the former West Germany.
[2] Only 1991 annual average figures available for Greece.
[3] The latest rate shown is for September 1994.
Source:
Statistical Office of the European Community Unemployment Bulletin.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *756*, what was the total cost of unemployment to the Government in *(a)* 1990–91, *(b)* 1991–92 and *(c)* 1992–93, together with the cost per person unemployed.

Mr. Oppenheim: Total expenditure on benefits to the unemployed in Great Britain and the average benefit per person is shown in the following table:

Table 1. Expenditure on benefits to the unemployed in Great Britain

Financial year	*Total expenditure £ millions*	*Average expenditure per claimant per financial year £*[1]
1989–90	4,501	2,800
1990–91	5,290	3,180
1991–92	7,558	3,210
1992–93	8,973	3,260
1993–94	9,720	3,510

[1] Rounded to nearest £10.

The figures for total expenditure on benefits to the unemployed are taken from the Social Security Statistics 1994 published by the Department of Social Security. They differ slightly from those given in reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary which were based on the DSS departmental report. The DSS has subsequently revised its estimates. The average expenditure figure is derived by dividing the total expenditure by the average number of the seasonally unadjusted claimant count during the financial year.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage change in the total cost of unemployment between *(a)* 1989–90 and 1990–91, *(b)* 1990–91 and 1991–92, *(c)* 1991–92 and 1992–93 and *(d)* 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: Total expenditure on benefits to the unemployed in Great Britain, and the annual change is shown in the following table:

Table 1. Expenditure on benefits to the unemployed in Great Britain

Financial year	*Total expenditure £ millions*	*Percentage change on previous year*
1989–90	4,501	—
1990–91	5,290	+ 18
1991–92	7,558	+ 43
1992–93	8,973	+ 19
1993–94	9,720	+ 8

The figures for total expenditure on benefits to the unemployed are taken from the "Social Security Statistics 1994", page 3.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of 16 and 17-year-olds not in full-time education and without a job or training scheme *(a)* in spring 1994 and *(b)* on the most recent date for which figures are available (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in each part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* I have written to the hon. Member and placed a copy of my reply in the Library.

Education and Training

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department is planning to spend on education and training per unemployed person in 1995–96; and what was the level in 1989–90 at 1995–96 prices.

Mr. Paice: As the programmes covered by this expenditure are by no means confined to the unemployed, it would not be appropriate to express expenditure per unemployed person.

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the work of ACAS.

Mr. Oppenheim: Industrial relations have improved substantially during ACAS's 20-year lifetime. ACAS has played an important part in bringing about these improvements and will continue to do so.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department is spending on

training; and what the level of planned spending is in 1997–98 in today's prices.

Mr. Paice: Forecast expenditure by the Department on training and education programmes this year is £2,042 million. Planned expenditure on these programmes in 1997–98 is £1,801 million at current prices.

Industrial Tribunals

28. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the future role of industrial tribunals.

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment to my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall) on 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *696–97*.

Employment Service

29. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been helped into jobs by the Employment Service in the last year.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Service placed 1,900,600 people into jobs in the last year. This is 16 per cent. more than in the previous year.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 1 December, *Official Report*, column *871*, if he will make a statement regarding his Department's expenditure on special advisers in each of the last three financial years and for the financial year 1979–80.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *937*.

North Norfolk Action

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *696*, if he will make a statement on the principal findings *(a)* for North Norfolk Action and *(b)* for each of the Workstart programmes.

Miss Widdecombe: Evaluations of North Norfolk Action and Workstart both showed encouraging results, and action is being taken to build on these. The most successful element of North Norfolk Action has already been adopted in the 1-2-1 pilot for 18 to 24-year-olds, which will become a national programme in April 1995. The evaluation of Workstart indicated that the subsidy has had a significant effect on employers' attitudes to long-term unemployed people. The 5,000 Workstart places announced in the Budget will provide an opportunity to explore the potential for varying the level of subsidy to obtain the most cost-effective results.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total amount the Government have *(a)* saved from the Workstart scheme and *(b)* spent on North Norfolk Action, since their implementation; and what has been the expenditure or saving per person per week on each scheme.

Miss Widdecombe: Savings in public expenditure from any employment programme arise from long-term improvements in the functioning of the labour market, and cannot be calculated in the terms requested.

Evaluation of Workstart suggested that it had had a positive effect on employers' willingness to recruit long-term unemployed people, and this approach will be explored further using the 5,000 pilot places announced in the Budget. North Norfolk Action provided work experience or a series of interviews with an Employment Service adviser for people who had been out of the labour market for some time. The national work experience programme, community action, was extended in the Budget, and will provide 40,000 places a year.

Under the first Workstart pilot, employers who recruited long-term unemployed people were paid £60 a week for the first six months, and £30 a week for the next six. Expenditure on the pilot until the end of November 1994 totalled £1,494,516.

Providers on North Norfolk Action were paid £52 per week per place, and the total cost of the pilot was £686,624.

Non-wage Labour Costs

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of non-wage labour costs on employment prospects.

Mr. Oppenheim: Non-wage labour costs are lower in the United Kingdom than in most countries of the European Union. I believe that any increase in such costs would worsen employment prospects as high non-wage labour costs make it more expensive for employers to create jobs.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Miss Widdecombe: Officials within the Department are investigating the possibility of establishing links to external E-mail services.

Self-employment

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of the self-employment in Great Britain in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1985 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is given in the following table.

Self-employment: Great Britain (seasonally adjusted)

	Thousands
June 1979	1,956
June 1985	2,704
June 1994	3,192

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what surpluses were held by each training

and enterprise council at the end of each of the last two financial years.

Mr. Paice: A list of English training and enterprise councils, their accumulated reserves and in-year operating surpluses, as shown in their annual statutory audited accounts, at the end of the financial year 1992–93 is shown in the following table.

I am unable to give the figures requested for 1993–94 as this information is not yet in the public domain for every TEC. However, as TEC accounts for 1993–94 become available to the Department, copies will be placed in the Library.

TECS by region	*Accumulated reserves 92–93 £ 000s*	*Post tax operating surplus 92–93 £*
Northern		
County Durham	6,582	2,595,107
Northumberland	3,696	1,233,752
Teesside	9,186	3,388,000
Tyneside	4,486	(883,000)
Sunderland (Wearside)	2,514	512,381
	26,464	6,846,240
North West		
CEWTEC	2,579	603,311
Cumbria	2,999	110,772
ELTEC	3,364	1,338,587
LAWTEC	2,917	(236,657)
Merseyside	4,210	1,191,532
NORMID	1,093	(418,902)
QUALITEC	1,055	312,509
	18,217	2,901,152
Greater Manchester		
Bolton/Bury	2,861	847,848
Manchester	3,377	(880,942)
METRO	519	108,000
Oldham	1,456	83,406
Rochdale	1,087	597,651
South and East Cheshire	2,419	420,244
Stockport and High Peak	2,782	655,247
	14,501	1,831,454
Yorks and Humber		
Barnsley/Doncaster	3,993	1,012,208
Bradford	3,432	1,524,888
Calderdale and Kirklees	828	(1,574)
Humberside	5,193	2,258,408
Leeds	5,724	2,160,436
North Yorks	4,353	936,000
Rotherham	2,865	1,134,336
Sheffield	4,157	883,000
Wakefield	3,110	668,301
	33,655	10,576,003
Eastern		
Bedfordshire	1,556	220,801
CAMBS	622	34,280
Essex	5,037	742,805
Gtr Peterborough	1,532	661,071
Hertfordshire	2,641	1,199,133
Norfolk and Waverney	2,161	(411,789)
Suffolk	2,984	473,259
	16,533	2,919,560
East Midlands		
Gtr Nottingham	944	98,000
Leicester	4,597	1,888,317
Lincolnshire	2,553	1,328,872
Northamptonshire	1,977	109,609
North Derbyshire	749	87,828
North Nottinghamshire	1,289	(376,000)
South Derbyshire	4,106	611,343
	16,215	3,747,969
West Midlands		
Birmingham	1,212	(1,606,000)
Central England	1,340	347,027
Coventry/Warwick	2,203	7,122
Dudley	1,214	801,744
HAWTEC	1,679	702,859
Sandwell	1,706	788,829
Shropshire	1,304	703,807
Staffordshire	5,789	1,717,636
Walsall	2,340	941,491
Wolverhampton	1,411	379,147
	20,198	4,783,662
South West		
Avon	3,071	1,647,961
Devon/Cornwall	7,407	121,000
Dorset	2,848	53,973
Gloucester	1,575	666
Somerset	1,746	711,143
Wiltshire	1,110	251,265
	17,757	2,786,008
London		
AZTEC	1,932	411,486
CENTEC	906	757,876
CILNTEC	2,161	1,610,046
LETEC	655	1,138,517
North London	3,005	1,851,198
North West London	864	424,679
SOLOTEC	3,439	2,530,966
South Thames	3,611	2,318,842
West London	1,163	1,000,929
	17,736	12,044,539
South East		
Hampshire	4,679	1,430,483
Isle of White	879	161,087
Kent	5,774	2,231,284
Milton Keynes/Nth Bucks	677	99,326
Heart of England	2,424	860,611
Surrey	1,663	967,259
Sussex	5,230	1,875,000
Thames Valley Ent.	3,970	643,002
	25,296	8,268,052
Grand total	206,572	56,704,639

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total budget of Hampshire training and enterprise council for the year 1994–95.

Mr. Paice: The budget made available by the Employment Department, Department of the Environment and Department for Trade and Industry to Hampshire training and enterprise council during 1994–95 is £40,543,124.

Apprenticeships

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance he has given to training and enterprise councils concerning assurances they can give to employers about funding for the modern apprentice scheme beyond the first year.

Mr. Paice: The operating agreement between the Department and the training and enterprise councils provides assurances for the continuity of funding. This ensures that sufficient funds will be made available to TECs so that young people on modern apprenticeships can complete their training.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the need to give long-term commitments to employers involved in the modern apprentice scheme.

Mr. Paice: I am not aware of having received any particular representations concerning the need to give long-term commitments to employers involved in modern apprenticeships. Sufficient funds will be made available to training and enterprise councils to ensure that young people can complete their training under modern apprenticeship with employers—normally some three years.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what checks his Department is planning on attendance records for those involved in the modern apprentice scheme and working with an employer.

Mr. Paice: In training and enterprise council areas where there is a pilot scheme for starts and outcomes funding, no attendance records will be made. Where training weeks continue to be used, checks will be made to substantiate training weeks claimed from the Department and that these records are in accordance with the Department's requirements. For employed status trainees the records required are either:

(a) employers' own payroll or attendance records, providing these record unauthorised absence and employers are prepared for them to be used to verify the attendance of modern apprentices; or

(b) the attendance records specified by the Department.

A sample of records will be checked, primarily by the TEC with whom the provider of the modern apprenticeship has a contract, in accordance with the guidance issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The checks will be the same as for other programmes where the Department pays for training weeks.

Work Trials

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many firms and individuals have been involved in work trials in the parliamentary constituency of Derbyshire, North-East since the inception of the scheme; how many people have been placed in permanent employment on *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time basis as a consequence; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 10 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about Work Trials in the parliamentary constituency of North East Derbyshire.

Although performance information is not recorded on a constituency basis, North Derbyshire is broadly covered by the Employment Service Jobcentres in Clay Cross, Dronfield, Eckington and Staveley. Since inception of the Work Trial scheme in April 1993, these offices have signed agreements with 45 employers and run 102 Work Trials which have resulted in 70 placings.

Records of the break-down of these placings into full and part time work are not maintained by the majority of Work Trials are for full time positions of over 16 hours a week.

I hope this is helpful.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Miss Widdecombe: Disaggregated information of this nature is not available.

Employment, London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the net increase or decrease of jobs in London which he estimates for 1995.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on employment projections is not available. The level of civilian work force in employment in Greater London increased by 65,000—2 per cent.—over the year to September 1994.

Source:
Work force in employment survey.

Part-time Employment

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of the article in the amended treaty of Rome relating to his announcement concerning part-time employment of 20 December 1994, together with the dates at which Her Majesty's Government assented to the article, and those on which the House gave a Second and Third Reading to the relevant ratifying Act.

Miss Widdecombe: The judicial review case R. *v* Secretary of State for Employment ex parte Equal Opportunities Commission and another was brought under article 119 of the treaty of Rome, which has been in the treaty since it was adopted in 1957; under the equal pay directive, which was adopted in 1975 and came into force in 1976; and under the equal treatment directive, which was adopted in 1976 and came into force in 1978. The application of article 119 is a consequence of the United Kingdom's accession to the European Community, which was approved by Parliament in the European Communities Act 1972. The directives' requirements are met in the UK by provisions of the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many skilled workers have lost their jobs in manufacturing industry since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available in the form requested.

Young People

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish tables showing for spring 1994 and for the latest date for which figures are available the total number of 16 and 17-year-olds in the United Kingdom together with the number and percentage who are *(a)* employed, *(b)* self-employed, *(c)* full-time students, *(d)* undertaking Government employment and training programmes, *(e)* classified as International Labour Organisation unemployed and *(f)* economically inactive.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment has written to the hon. Member and placed a copy of his reply in the Library.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the opportunities available for young people aged 16 and 17 years who are classified as *(a)* ILO unemployed and *(b)* economically inactive.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* I have written to the hon. Member and placed a copy of my reply in the Library.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much public money will be spent on entertaining, Christmas decorations and other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' private offices and offices and official residences.

Miss Widdecombe: *[pursuant to her reply, 28 November 1994, column 515]:* I regret that my reply of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *515*, was incorrect. It should have read: such costs are included in the total running cost expenditure for this Department which is published in the departmental report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Social Affairs Council held on 21 December 1994.

Miss Widdecombe: I attended the Social Affairs Council on 21 December in Brussels, for a further discussion of the draft directive on posted workers.

Discussion was again inconclusive. As at the previous Council on 6 December 1994, I made clear our considerable difficulties of both principle and detail. A number of other member states, also, had significant difficulties with the proposal, and agreement was not reached.

Commissioner Flynn reported to the Council on the Essen European Council.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 1 December, *Official Report*, columns *895-96*, if he will make a statement regarding his Department's expenditure on special advisers in each of the last three financial years and for the financial year 1979–80.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *937*.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what measures have been taken to reform the common agricultural policy in the interests of consumers since the publication of Cmnd. 6003—"Membership of the European Community-report on Renegotiation";

(2) if he will describe by reference to each commodity listed in paragraph 9 of Cmnd. 6003, the progress which has been made since 1974 towards securing a better balance between supply and demand.

Mr. Jack: Since 1979, the common agricultural policy has seen a number of changes. The most notable of these was the 1992 CAP reform agreement, which was a major development in moving the CAP closer to the market. The agreement included significant reductions in support prices of major commodities and other measures to cut excess production, thereby securing a better balance between supply and demand, reducing dependence on intervention and reducing the cost to consumers.

There are no commodities listed in paragraph 9 of Cmnd. 6003.

North Sea Fishing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (!) what action is currently being considered at *(a)* national and *(b)* international level to exclude industrial fishing from those areas of the North sea which are of high environmental value;

(2) if he will seek to introduce a quota system for sandeels when he attends the European Council of Fisheries Ministers later in December.

Mr. Jack: It is recognised that sandeel and other short-lived species serve as food for many of the human consumption fish and other top predators in the marine eco-system. Scientific knowledge of the short-lived species is not as extensive as for other fish species. For this, and other reasons, the United Kingdom pressed the Commission to establish a working party of marine ecologists and fisheries biologists to study the implications for the marine eco-system of fishing in general and industrial fishing in particular. This group met in May and has reported to the Commission. When its report is discussed in the Council, attention will need to be paid to the environmental aspects of industrial fishing.

It is for the European Commission to propose new quotas. It has not done so for sandeels for 1995; the current scientific advice is that sandeels in the North sea can sustain fisheries at their present level.

Rabies

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of rabies in animals there were in Belgium in 1993 and 1994.

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *893*.

Animal Transportation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *627*, regarding exported livestock, what plans he has to prosecute livestock exporters for not fulfilling the journey plan and not feeding and watering the animals after 15 hours.

Mrs. Browning: We have no such plans. The departure from the original journey plan was due to weather conditions beyond the transporter's control. When the calves arrived back at Coventry having failed to land at Rennes, a judgment had to be made, in the light of their condition and all the circumstances, whether they should be taken straight back to their premises of origin or whether a stop for food and rest should be arranged first. The Ministry's veterinary inspector, who was present and had the power to serve a notice requiring food and rest to be provided, agreed with the judgment that it was in the best interest of the calves to be taken back to their home premises without further delay. The fact that in the event the overall journey took fifteen and a half hours does not invalidate that judgment.

EC Vote

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how Britain voted in the recent EC vote on extending the moratorium on the use of bovine somatotropin.

Mrs. Browning: The United Kingdom voted against the proposed Council decision to continue the moratorium on the marketing and use of bovine somatotropin until 31 December 1999, as this proposal was without scientific justification. The decision was, however, adopted by qualified majority.

Premium Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each of the three counties of Yorkshire and for Humberside the total cost in each year since 1991 of *(a)* the sheep annual premium, *(b)* suckler cow premium and *(c)* the beef special premium; and what is his estimate for 1994.

Mr. Jack: The information available is provided in the table:

Total annual payments	*North Yorkshire* £	*South Yorkshire* £	*West Yorkshire* £	*Humberside* £
1991				
SAPS[1]	—	—	—	—
SCPS	2,458,165	329,368	652,597	606,320
BSPS[2]	—	—	—	—
1992				
SAPS[1]	2,556,670	798,337	18,669,499	1,050,303
SCPS	2,726,418	381,756	733,215	657,953
BSPS[2]	—	—	—	—
1993				
SAPS[1]	2,437,136	732,425	18,324,704	1,060,504
SCPS[4]	3,751,256	481,010	958,669	857,170
BSPS[4]	5,406,598	606,618	826,398	1,287,532
1994 (est)				
SAPS[1,5]	1,500,028	450,829	11,318,695	658,345
SCPS[4]	4,609,305	615,934	1,218,486	1,092,518
BSPS[5]	2,650,500	276,879	410,012	640,863

[1] Breakdown by county not readily available.
[2] Current BSPS was introduced in 1993, earlier figures not comparable.
[3] LFA Supplement included.
[4] Extensification premium included.
[5] Advances of premium paid as at 20.12.94.

Arable Aid

Mr. Battle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the yield figures set for land in *(a)* less-favoured areas and *(b)* non less-favoured areas in the calculation of arable aid payments in each of the three counties of Yorkshire and Humberside for the 1994–95 marketing year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The yield figures used in the calculation of the arable area aid payments in England are the same for both less-favoured areas and non less-favoured areas and also for each county. For cereals, protein crops, linseed and set-aside areas this 5.93 tonne per hectare and for oilseed crops it is 3.08 tonnes per hectare.

These figures are based on the average yield for cereals and oilseeds in England over the five years from 1986–87 to 1990–91, excluding the highest and lowest figures.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much a farmer growing cereals will be paid in arable aid for each hectare of cereals grown in 1994–95 in each of the three counties of Yorkshire and Humberside in *(a)* less-favoured areas and *(b)* non less-favoured areas; what are the figures for the year 1993–94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The arable area payment for cereals grown in 1994–95 will be 265 ecu per hectare. The sterling equivalent of this can not be calculated until the green rate for ecu conversion is known for 10 July 1995. However, it is expected that it will be approximately £247 per hectare. The figure will be same for both less-favoured areas and non less-favoured areas in England.,

The arable area payment for cereals grown in England in 1993–94 is £193.53 per hectare.

The increase is the final one planned under the arable area payments scheme to compensate for reductions in intervention prices for cereals.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out by county a breakdown of the 1994 area payments scheme.

Mr. Jack: I am unable to provide the information requested by the hon. Member at the moment. However,

I will write to him with this information as soon as it is available.

Sugar Beet

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food how much per tonne is given to European farmers for growing sugar beet; and what is the value on the world market for sugar per tonne.

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 15 December 1994, column 791]:* The price at which quota sugar can be sold on the world market with the aid of export refunds was incorrect. This should have been around 280 ecu/tonne—£267/tonne*

*1 ecu = £0.953575

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* hold open meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* The table shows the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by MAFF and whether they fulfil the criteria specified in the question.

In every case where information is published, this is done on a voluntary basis.

Advisory NDPBS sponsored by MAFF which	*(A) hold open meetings*	*(B) conduct public consultation exercises*	*(C) conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests*	*(D) publish a register of members' interests*	*(E) publish agendas for meetings*	*(F) publish the minutes of meetings*
Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Advisory Committee on Pesticides	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees	no	no	no	no	no	no
Committee on Agricultural Valuation	no	[1]yes	no	no	no	no
Consultative Panel on Badgers and Tuberculosis	no	no	no	no	no	no
Consumer Panel	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Consumers Committee for England and Wales	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Consumers Committee for Great Britain	no	no	yes	no	no	no
Farm Animal Welfare Council	no	yes	yes	no	no	no
Food Advisory Committee	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Hill Farming Advisory Committee for England, Wales and Northern Ireland	no	no	no	no	no	no
National Food Survey Committee	no	no	no[2]	no	no	no
Regional Panels for the Farming Industry	no	no	no	no	no	no
Salmon Advisory Committee	no	no	no	no	no	no
Spongiform Encephalopathies Advisory Committee	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Sugar Beet Research and Education Committee	no	no	no	no	no	no
Veterinary Products Committee	no	no	no	yes	no	[3]no

[1] Occasional consultation with industry representative organisations.
[2] Membership includes representatives of outside commercial interests.
[3] A voluntary news release is published after each meeting detailing the main points.

WALES

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Redwood: It is not possible to give a precise estimate of additional cost but it is expected to be minimal.

Signal Controls (Alltami)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will release funds to Clwyd county council to enable the Highways Authority to put signal controls at the A494 junction Tan Law lane, Alltami.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It has previously been confirmed in correspondence with the hon. Member that traffic

signals would not be appropriate at the A494 junction, Tan Lan lane, Alltami. Officials are reviewing conditions at the junction to see if any measures can be introducted to enhance safety.

NHS (Wales)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of operating per head of population on NHS provision in Wales, with family health services expenditure shown separately.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is as follows:

District health authority	*[1]Total expenditure 1992–93 £000*	*[2]Per capita spending £*
Clwyd	173,967	420
East Dyfed	110,099	464
Gwent	195,361	435
Gwynedd	109,915	459
Mid Glamorgan	247,073	455
Pembrokeshire	48,623	427
Powys	62,501	524
South Glamorgan	223,460	544
West Glamorgan	168,143	453
Wales	1,339,142	462

Source:
Final accounts 1992–93.
Notes:
[1] 1992 estimate for 1994–95 target population.
[2] In addition, WHCSA total expenditure for 1992–93 was £31.509 million.

Family health services authority	*[1]Total expenditure 1992–93 £000*	*[2]Per capita spending £*
Clwyd	63,714	154
Dyfed[3]	51,455	147
Gwent	65,045	145
Gwynedd	35,940	150
Mid Glamorgan	77,755	143
Powys	17,728	149
South Glamorgan	54,816	134
West Glamorgan	54,842	148
Wales	421,295	145

Source:
Final accounts 1992–93.
Notes:
[1] 1992 estimate for 1994–95 target population.
[2] Dyfed FHSA covers East Dyfed and Pembrokeshire Health Authorities.
[3] In addition, the Dental Practice Board incurred £51.282 million on the provision of General Dental Services in Wales.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Redwood: My Department already has the facility to communicate via electronic mail between Government Departments.

NHS Pay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his statement on public expenditure in Wales on 14 December, *Official Report*, column 925, if he will give details of his proposals for funding national pay awards to doctors and nurses in the NHS in Wales with respect to *(a)* provider unit prices and *(b)* purchaser costs.

Mr. Redwood: I expect pay rises in the NHS in Wales in 1995–96 to be offset by improved efficiency, enabling further growth in patient services. I made clear the total increase in cash for the NHS, and look to health authorities to purchase an increasing quantity of good health care with the money.

Guidance Notes

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement comparing the guidance notes issued by English Nature with those issued by the Countryside Commission for Wales, Cyngar Cefn Gwlad Cymru, listing those areas not covered in notes by each; what action people in Wales are to take where only English guidance notes exist: and how soon he expects Countryside Commission for Wales to have a complete set of guidance notes in English and Welsh.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am not aware of any guidance notes published by English Nature or the countryside Council for Wales of the type described by the hon. Member.

Acorns Nurseries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the termination of the contract with Acorns Nurseries for the provision of a creche for his Department and other civil service staff in central Cardiff.

Mr. Redwood: The management contract with Acorns Nurseries was terminated because of breaches of contract which prejudiced the delivery of the service to parents and their children.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to provide a continuation of creche facilities for his staff following the termination of the contract with Acorns Nurseries; what temporary arrangements he has made; and when he expects a long-term replacement contract to be in place.

Mr. Redwood: It is planned to re-open the nursery with a new management contractor for an interim period from early February once essential remedial work has been carried out. At the same time, tenders will be invited for a full three-year contract to follow the interim period.

GP Fundholder Steering Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of States for Wales what is the membership of the GP fundholder steering group; what is the frequency of its meetings; and if he will make a statement concerning its work.

Mr. Redwood: I announced the formation of the GP fundholding steering group in my letter to all GP fundholders of 23 March 1994, copied to all health authorities. The group comprises representatives from the Welsh Office health department, health authorities, trusts and GP fundholders. It has met on three occasions; future meetings are expected to be bi-monthly.

I will write to the hon. Member about the composition of the group and the terms of reference, and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Regional Development Funding

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those public projects which received European regional development funding and were subsequently privatised over the last 10 years, indicating *(a)* the level of funding and *(b)* the dates when it was received.

Mr. Gwilym Jones *[holding answer 24 November 1994]:* A number of projects have been approved for European regional development fund grant since 1 January 1984 in Wales from public bodies which have subsequently been privatised. Payments to such projects would normally cover a number of years following the approval of a project.

A copy of the information available has been placed in the Library of the House.

Child Care

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the total social services budget was spent on child care provision in Wales in the last five years.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* The information requested is given in the table:

Gross expenditure on child care services[1]

Year	*Per cent.*
1988–89	21
1989–90	20
1990–91	22
1991–92	22
1992–93	21

Source:
Local authority returns.
[1] Expenditure on children aged 0–16 as a percentage of total gross local authority expenditure on personal social services. Includes appropriate apportionment for those services which cover children and other client groups.

Eurorail Freight Depot

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the Eurorail freight depot; what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the evaluation of the short-listed sites from the point of view of *(a)* freight transport and *(b)* property development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* No sites have been shortlisted although the agency is considering proposals from private developers. I wish to speed up progress and, to that end, I am discussing the issues with the Secretary of State for Transport.

Further Education

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the budgets of colleges of further education was spent on staff salaries in each of the last three years.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* This information is not held centrally. However, I have asked the further Education Funding Council for Wales to let the hon. Member have information which it will have available shortly in relation to the period since the further education colleges were incorporated on 1 April 1993. I have asked the council to place a copy of the reply in the Library.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that when children are given statements of special educational needs that their parents or guardians are advised to investigate whether their children may be eligible for benefits such as disability allowance.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* I would expect that all those who are professionally involved with children in need, whether or not they have statements of special educational need, to seek to identify ways in which the child and his or her parents or guardians may be helped.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what plans he has for the recruitment of *(a)* permanent and *(b)* casual staff to his Department;

(2) how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* casual staff his Department employs at present; and how many in each category he estimates will be employed in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98;

(3) pursuant to his oral statement on public expenditure in Wales on 14 December, *Official Report*, column 927, what is the total number of jobs to be lost in his Department arising from the reduction in total running costs provisions for his Department; and how many in each year between 1995–96 and 1997–98 will be lost in *(a)* training and enterprise councils, *(b)* CADW, *(c)* Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector and *(d)* the Welsh Office itself.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* At 1 December, my Department employed the full-time equivalent of 2,309 permanent and 240 casual staff. Preliminary estimates indicate a reduction of some 200 jobs by 1995–96 and 400 by 1997–98.

The aim will be to manage these reductions by voluntary means, including natural wastage and continuing close control of recruitment, and to avoid compulsory redundancy. Staffing plans for the Welsh Office, including CADW, and OHMCI for 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 will be set out in the 1995 departmental report to be published in early March. The staffing levels of training and enterprise councils will be determined by their boards in due course.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the cold weather payments scheme so as more accurately to reflect regional and local variations and to introduce a more flexible scheme.

Mr. Roger Evans: The cold weather payment scheme is reviewed annually with the Meteorological Office to ensure the links between weather stations and local post code areas are as efficient and effective as possible. The

Meteorological Office uses its judgment and expertise to link post code areas to 63 national weather stations, reflecting the terrain and local conditions. Substantial changes have been introduced to enable automatic payments to be made for each forecasted or sustained period of exceptionally cold weather ensuring a 100 per cent. take-up of payments.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been recovered by the compensation recovery unit in each of the last three years in 1994 prices.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) on 27 October, *Official Report*, column *803*. The amount recovered in 1994–95—up to and including 30 November 1994—now stands at £66 million.

Child Care Disregard

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what the average award was made to family recipients of the new child care disregard since its introduction in October; and what was the figure for those receiving maximum family credit and for those on the lowest level of family credit;

(2) how many family credit recipients have claimed the new child care disregard since its introduction in October; and how many of these claims have been *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful.

Mr. Roger Evans: In the two-month period to 30 November 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, 5,060 families received higher family credit awards as a result of the new help with child care charges. In 4,340 of these cases, the additional help increased their award to the maximum amount of family credit. The average additional weekly amount was £15.60. A further 5,180 families claimed help with child care charges but did not receive help; 3,720 families were not eligible because they did not satisfy the qualifying conditions and 1,460 families received no extra help because they were already receiving maximum family credit. Families with child care charges, including those who receive maximum family credit, may get extra help through housing benefit and council tax benefit.

It will be some time before the new help takes full effect as existing family credit recipients can only claim the child care help when their current 26-week award expires, while many potential beneficiaries need to find work of 16 hours or more and to make appropriate child care arrangements.

Five per cent. sample of family credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 30 November 1994. The figures do not include claims made by 30 November 1994 but decided after that date.

Incomes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many children in *(a)* the city of York, *(b)* North Yorkshire and *(c)* Yorkshire and Humberside lived in a household whose income was (i) in the lowest 10th of household incomes nationally and (ii) in the highest 10th of household incomes nationally in 1979 and in the most recent year for which figures are available;

(2) how many children in *(a)* the city of York, *(b)* North Yorkshire and *(c)* Yorkshire and Humberside lived in a household whose income was half or less than half the national average household income in 1979 and in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available on a regional basis.

Statistics on patterns of household disposable income, for the United Kingdom as a whole, are provided in "Households Below Average Income 1979—1991–92", published in July 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has about the number of previously employed and absent parents who have ceased working after receiving an assessment of liability to pay maintenance from the Child Support Agency.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 12 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *569*.

Income Support

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for the most recent available full year the annual number of people aged under 25 years claiming *(a)* income support without unemployment benefit, *(b)* unemployment benefit without income support and *(c)* both income support and unemployment benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: The annual number of claims is not available, but figures for the number of claims as at November 1993 are set out in the table.

Claimants under 25 years (thousands)

Category	*November 1993*
Income support without unemployment benefit	1,047
Unemployment benefit without income support	91
Both income support and unemployment benefit	6

Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. They are from:
1. The income support statistical quarterly inquiry.
2. The half-yearly analysis of unemployed claimants.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to consult the Social Security Advisory Committee regarding his proposals for restricting income support payments for mortgage interest.

Mr. Roger Evans: We will be referring our proposals to the Social Security Advisory Committee. The committee will then decide if it intends to have them formally referred for consultation and a report.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Hague: The private office of the Secretary of State for Social Security is currently able to receive and respond to communication via electronic mail from the Department and its agencies.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the level of expenditure on housing benefit in each year since its introduction.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Housing Benefit expenditure (in cash terms) Great Britain

	Rent allowance	*£ million Rent rebate*
1983–84	536	1,980
1984–85	687	2,145
1985–86	881	2,296
1986–87	996	2,419
1987–88	1,030	2,506
1988–89	1,055	2,718
1989–90	1,336	2,946
1990–91	1,597	3,345
1991–92	2,322	3,675
1992–93	3,257	4,347
1993–94 (Estimated outturn)	3,817	5,004

Source:
Departmental reports.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which of the 82 people described as panel members in annexe 3 to the report "The Medical Assessment for Incapacity Benefit" were not among the 80 experts referred to in part 2 of the report; why their names were included in annexe 3; what part each of them played in the work of the panel; how many sub-groups of the panel were formed and for what purposes; how many members each sub-group had; how many member of each sub-group were not members of the panel; how many were employed by *(a)* the Benefits Agency medical service, *(b)* the Department of Social Security and *(c)* the Department of Health; and how many had medical qualifications.

Mr. Hague: Originally 80 people agreed to join the panel. Some dropped out and were replaced at a later date. The 82 people listed at annexe 3 of the report "The Medical Assessment for Incapacity Benefit" were all members of the expert panel at some time. The list includes all those invited on to the panel who agreed that their names should be made public.

Only one sub-group of the panel was formed, to consider special procedures for assessing the effects of mental health. There were five members, two of whom were employed by the Benefits Agency medical service. In addition, we consulted widely with psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and others representing people with mental health problems.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he decided that the names of the members of the panel on incapacity should not be published without their agreement; and if he will seek the consent of numbers of the sub-group on mental health and incapacity, who agreed to publication of their names in the report "The Medical Assessment of Incapacity Benefit", to the disclosure of the membership of the sub-group.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1377*, and 25 November 1994, column *421*.

Mortgage Protection Policies

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what negotiations his Department has had with the insurance market about private mortgage protection policies.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 7 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *363*.

Habitual Residence Test

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have taken the habitual residence test; and if he will list *(a)* how many have failed it, *(b)* their nationality and *(c)* their age.

Mr. Roger Evans: All income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit claimants have been subject to the habitual residence test since its introduction on 1 August 1994. Provisional figures from the Benefits Agency for the period 1 August to 30 November 1994 indicate that 9,601 income support claimants failed to satisfy the test. Information in relation to housing benefit and council tax benefit claimants who fail the test will not be available until late 1996. Information about a claimant's nationality is not available. Information about a claimant's age is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

VAT (fuel)

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to explain the compensation package for VAT on fuel at 8 per cent. to pensioners who do not have an order book because they receive their pension directly to their bank account by bank automated credit transfer.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *929*, which also applies to automated credit transfer arrangements.

National Insurance

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cumulative effect on the national insurance fund of contracting out and incentive payments for appropriate personal pensions since 1986, giving also an annual cost for the most recent available full year.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available in the form requested. The most recent published, audited figure on the cost to the national insurance fund of rebates and incentives for appropriate personal pensions, and incentive payments to other types of newly contracted out pension schemes is £9.9 billion up to the end of 1992–93. This includes £2.7 billion for the 1992–93 tax year.

The Government Actuary's report on the contributions uprating order for 1994–95 estimated the costs for 1993–94 and 1994–95 as £2.8 billion and £1.9 billion respectively.

Widow's Payment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future uprating of the £1,000 widow's payment.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The level of the lump sum widow's payment has remained at £1,000 since its introduction in 1988. We have no plans to increase it.

Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the numbers of claimants of the range of sickness and incapacity benefits, *(b)* the numbers of unemployed at the closest point of comparison to the figures in *(a)* and *(c)* the numbers of workers in employment at the closest point of comparison to the figures in *(a)* for each year since 1988.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Sick and Unemployed Benefit claimants and numbers in employment
(Numbers in thousands, rounded to nearest thousand)

Benefit	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Invalidity Benefit[1]	1,047	1,126	1,209	1,317	1,455	1,606	1,705
Sickness Benefit[1]	228	266	309	421	473	535	578
Severe Disablement Allowance[1]	263	275	285	274	289	298	304
Disability Working Allowance[2]						3	4
Totals	1,538	1,667	1,803	2,012	2,217	2,442	2,591
Unemployed claimants[3]	2,182	1,682	1,519	2,201	2,627	2,812	2,545
Work force in employment[3]	25,529	26,317	26,528	25,613	25,023	24,605	24,619

[1] From 1988 to 1990 information based on 1 per cent. sample of claimants on 2.4.88, 1.4.89 and 31.3.90
From 1991 to 1994 information based on 100 per cent. clerical count on the last day of June, and is subject to revision
[2] Information from 100 per cent. count in May.
[3] Information is for Great Britain on last day of June, seasonally adjusted.
Unemployed claimants are those claiming income support, unemployment benefit and/or national insurance credits who say they satisfy the conditions for receipt of benefits as unemployed people.
Work force in employment comprises employees in employment, self-employed HM forces and participants on work-related government training programmes.

Guaranteed Minimum Pension Test

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to replace the guaranteed minimum pension test.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government announced their plans to replace the guaranteed minimum pension test with a new test of overall scheme quality in the White Paper "Security, Equality, Choice: the Future for Pensions" on 23 June 1994. Detailed proposals were set out in the Pensions Bill put before the House of Lords on Thursday 15 December 1994.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Hague: The Department and its agencies have so far identified estimated expenditure of approximately £1.8 million to cover all costs associated with the changes in national telephone dialling codes. These costs will be met within existing budgets.

Funeral Payments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases funeral payments from the social fund have included additional expenses arising from the requirements of the religious faith of the deceased; and in how many of these cases the addition was of the maximum permitted amount in each year since 1988–89.

Mr. Roger Evans: Claims for additional religious costs are a rarity. The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is in a position to respond to the report by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on disqualification from unemployment benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: I met the chief executive of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and two of her colleagues on Tuesday 6 December to discuss the report "Benefit of the Doubt". The recommendations made in the report will be considered in the context of the jobseeker's allowance scheme.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the progress of the drafting of his Bill on discrimination against disabled people; and if he is yet in a position to undertake that the scope of the Bill and money resolution will be sufficiently wide to permit an amendment providing for a disability rights commission.

Mr. Hague: The Bill will be introduced shortly. I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *539*. It is not our intention to draft the Bill in such a way as to rule out full discussion of this issue.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ivory Coast

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning human rights in the Ivory Coast; and what representations have been made to the authorities there by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Baldry: We are aware of the July 1994 Amnesty International report on freedom of expression and association in Cote d'Ivoire. We note also the emergence of encouraging signs in the field of human rights in the country. We are pleased to witness, for example, the maturing of the relationship between the Government and Ivorian human rights organisations.

Our ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire has made clear to the Ivorian authorities the importance which the British Government attach to good government, including full respect for human rights.

Export Controls

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards a new COCOM structure of export controls; and what exports or export destinations the Government currently consider should form part of such controls.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Multilateral negotiations to establish an export control regime to tackle new threats posed by excessive build-up of conventional weapons and related technology are continuing. Working groups have been established to agree and recommended on those goods to be controlled, the procedures for exports, the membership of the organisation and related administrative matters. The Government are committed to controls which are straight forward, responsible and transparent but which do not place an unnecessary bureaucratic burden on legitimate trade. They should be linked to identifiable threats and consistent with our international commitments.

At a high-level meeting in the Hague on 21 and 22 December, the 23 former COCOM and COCOM co-operating countries, reaffirmed their commitment to work towards the establishment of new arrangements as soon as possible. A further meeting is due to be held in February.

Bosnia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a request for the use of aircraft fitted with electronic combat reconnaissance devices was made by the United Kingdom either directly or indirectly through NATO actions and UNPROFOR forces in Bosnia; when it was agreed; and to which country or countries such request was made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is not our policy to comment on operational matters of this nature.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 December, *Official Report*, column *817*, concerning the legal basis for the protection by the United Nations of the civilian population of safe areas in Bosnia-Herzegovina, whether the United Nations Secretariat, the United Kingdom and other members of the Security Council take account in creating those areas of the possibility of use for war purposes to mount offensives against the Serbs.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Members of the United Nations Security Council, including the United Kingdom, and the United Nations Secretariat do take into account the possibility that safe areas might be used by one party to mount offensives against another. In his report on safe areas of 1 December, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the importance of definition and demilitarisation of safe areas by negotiation. NATO chiefs of defence staff meeting in The Hague on 19 and 20 December, noted the Secretary-General's report on safe areas and underscored the importance of achieving, by negotiations, agreement on complete demilitarisation of the safe areas acceptable to all parties and which could be effectively implemented and controlled by UNPROFOR.

Vietnam

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the European Union has to suggest to the Vietnamese Government that the delegation from the UN working group on arbitrary detention be allowed to return to the A20 re-education camp at Xuan Phoc, Phu Yen province, so that they may interview all prisoners who were unavailable on 28 October; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I am not aware of any such plans. Neither the UN working group on arbitrary detention nor the presidency of the European Union has raised this matter with Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the co-operation received from the Vietnamese Government by the delegation from the United Nations working group on arbitrary detention when they visited the A20 re-education camp, at Xuan Phoc, Phu Yen province, Vietnam, on 28 October 1994.

Mr. Baldry: The United Nations working group on arbitrary detention has not yet reported on its visit to Vietnam.

Iran

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to persuade the Government of Iran to allow United Nations special rapporteurs to investigate the murders of the Rev. Haik Hovsepian Mehr, the Rev. Tatess Michaelion and the Rev. Mehdi Dibaj and the situation of the Christian community in Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the involvement of UN special rapporteurs in investigating the human rights situation in Iran including the situation of Christians and the deaths of Rev. Mehr, Rev. Michaelian and Rev. Dibaj. We and our European partners co-sponsored a resolution on human rights in Iran which was adopted at the UN General Assembly in December 1994. It called on Iran to co-operate with the UN special rapporteur, Mr. Galindo-Pohl, and to carry out a thorough and impartial investigation into the deaths of the three pastors.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration was given to Iran's human rights record when his Department agreed to co-sponsor the forthcoming conference on the political

economy of contemporary Iran, to be held at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our European partners repeatedly underline to the Iranian Government the importance we attach to their human rights record. Our support for the forthcoming conference on Iran does not detract from our commitment to securing an improvement in Iranian behaviour. This conference is aimed at promoting an improved understanding of the Iranian economy and strengthening academic and economic contacts with Iranian professionals.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to persuade the Government of Iran to reopen the Iranian Bible Society and churches and to ensure that bibles are made freely available in that country.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our European partners remain committed to maintaining pressure on the Iranian Government to honour fundamental freedoms including freedom of religion. Most recently in December 1994 the European Union sponsored a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly reiterating our support for the work of the UN special rapporteur, Mr. Galindo-Pohl. Mr. Pohl has referred to the Bible Society's predicament in his reports and we are discussing with our European partners what further action we can take.

Caribbean

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *424*, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the relations between each of the dependent territories in the Caribbean and the regional secretariat in Barbados; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I am satisfied that the dependent territories regional secretariat is operating effectively. It has helped negotiate country policy plans with Anguilla, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands; and it is working with the Governments concerned to ensure their implementation. It is involved in our continuing dialogue with all the Caribbean DTs and is managing the financial assistance being provided from ODA and diplomatic wing resources. This is in line with the programme set out in the FCO departmental report 1994, Cm 2502, page 23.

UN Arms Register

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library *(a)* a list of the items that he submits to the United Nations arms register and *(b)* the returns he has made to that register; and what proposals he has to extend the scope of the register.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A copy of the United Kingdom return to the UN register of conventional arms is placed in the Library each year. Each return includes any items contained in the seven categories of equipment where such imports and exports have taken place. The categories are battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships and missiles and missiles launchers. The UK return also includes background information on national holdings and procurement from national production of equipment in the seven categories, and a statement of UK policy.

An international group of governmental experts met last summer to discuss the operation of the register and ways in which it may be developed. There was no consensus for change then, but future groups of experts will look at this question again.

Gibraltar

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy for ensuring that the people of Gibraltar enjoy the full benefits of membership including the right to vote in Euro-elections and for aircraft using Gibraltar airport to use EU airspace; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We expect Gibraltarians to enjoy those benefits to which they are entitled by virtue of Gibraltar's status within the European Union. We have made this clear whenever necessary. Annexe 2 of the 1976 EC Act on direct elections limits the franchise for European parliamentary elections to the United Kingdom.

There are no special restrictions affecting the ability of aircraft using Gibraltar airport to fly in the airspace of any EU member state.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Señor Javier Solana, concerning Gibraltar and related matters.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had very useful discussions with the Spanish Foreign Minister on 19 and 20 December 1994 on a wide range of issues, including Gibraltar. He welcomed the lifting of secondary checks at the frontier and stressed that they should not be reimposed. We agreed on the need for further practical co-operation on a trilateral basis to tackle drugs trafficking. He made clear that we would not deviate from our commitment to the people of Gibraltar in the 1969 constitution. There was no substantive discussion of sovereignty issues.

A joint statement was agreed and issued to the press on 20 December. A copy of this will shortly be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Nunn-Lugar Programme

Mr. Cousins: To aks the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for a European Union equivalent of the Nunn-Lugar co-operative threat reduction programme; and what projects or expenditure the United Kingdom has already committed towards objectives similar to the Nunn-Lugar programme.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Union has contributed to a number of civil nuclear safety programmes. Individual member states are separately undertaking projects related to military installations. The United Kingdom has committed some £35 million to projects which include the supply of supercontainers and heavy-duty vehicles for the secure transportation of nuclear warheads for dismantlement; and the resettlement and retraining of former military officers.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Baldry: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has work under way to allow the exchange of documents by electronic mail within the Department. Such a service is already available within the Overseas Development Administration.

The Department is investigating the use of the Internet to allow more extensive public access. It is likely an FCO presence will be established on the Internet via the CCTA computer later this year. It will allow the dissemination of FCO-ODA material in the first instance. Public electronic mail access to the Department will be considered after experience has been gained with the initial trials.

European Union

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions he proposes to take in response to recommendation 1250—1994—of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe relating to the enlargement of the Council of Europe and budgetary prospects; and if he will make statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Committee of Ministers' Deputies and the secretariat of the Council of Europe are currently looking at the resource implications of the enlargement of the Council of Europe. We shall take decisions once the results of their work are known. The parliamentary assembly's recommendation will be fully taken into account.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will arrange to publish after each Council of Ministers and each European summit a concordat version comparing the claims made by each Government to their own electorate about the nature of the decisions taken and the gains and losses for that country.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no plans to change the existing arrangements for informing the House of the outcomes of meetings of the Council of the European Union or the European Council.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Turkey concerning the imprisonment of some of their Members of Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As stated in the written answer by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of 15 December to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), *Official Report*, column *761*, we joined our EU partners in a statement of protest to the Turkish Government at the harsh prison sentences imposed on elected members of the Turkish Parliament. He subsequently raised the subject directly with the Turkish Foreign Minister when they met in Brussels on 19 December. The deputies concerned have exercised their right to appeal. We await news of a further hearing.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 29 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *58*. The FCO has active plans for making some data available on the Internet during 1995 and an announcement will be made when it is ready to come on stream.

China

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to ensure that China's most-favoured nation status is only reviewed after an improvement in its record on human rights.

Mr. Baldry: We regularly urge the Chinese authorities to improve their human rights record. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised the issue during his visit to China last July and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so with the Chinese Foreign Minister in September. But we have consistently held the view that trade and politics should be treated as separate. Trading and economic relationships are helping to open up the Chinese system and promote the country's development, to the benefit of the Chinese people.

Immigration (Quotas)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether entry clearance officers have been given a quota system for refusing foreign nationals entry to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: No. All applications for entry clearance are considered on their merits in accordance with the immigration rules.

Croatia

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the justification for putting Serbs in Croatia under the rule of Croatians.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: When we recognised Croatia on 15 January 1992 as an independent sovereign state, we made it clear that we expected the Government of Croatia to take steps to protect the rights of minorities. We continue to support the efforts of the international conference on former Yugoslavia to bring about a peaceful settlement between the Croatian Government and the Croatian Serb minority. We welcome the recent signing of the economic agreement by both sides which has resulted int he reopening of part of the Zagreb to Belgrade highway. We hope that further elements of the agreement will also be implemented shortly.

St. Helena

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what statutory basis the Governor of St. Helena requires the output of the local radio and television stations to receive his approval prior to transmission.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Radio St. Helena is not subject to any statutory control.

A television station is to be operated under licence by Cable and Wireless. The company is subject to statutory control in so far as the terms of that licence require them to notify the Governor of details of the services to be offered and in each case the channel and frequency of the service on which they will be provided.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on 9 December, *Official Report,* column *377,* if he will give *(a)* the total exposure in respect of defence contracts by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in 1993–94, *(b)* the amount of that exposure which was in default or had been rescheduled and *(c)* the cost to the Exchequer of such defaults on rescheduling in 1993–94.

Mr. Needham: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not currently available and cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional telephone expenditure.

Mr. Baldry: British Telecom has provided this service free of charge to its customers. There will be no additional costs to pay. Minor changes to stationery have been incorporated in standard reprinting procedures.

East Timor

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will prohibit the export of tanks and military aircraft to Indonesia until self-determination has been granted to the people of East Timor.

Mr. Baldry: There is no international embargo on arms sales to Indonesia. The export to any destination of arms and other goods listed in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 is prohibited without a licence by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. All applications for export licences for defence equipment are considered carefully on a case-by-case basis in the light of established criteria. We believe that the best way to achieve a satisfactory settlement of the East Timor issue is to encourage the Portuguese and Indonesians to continue a constructive dialogue under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General.

SCOTLAND

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington of 1 December, *Official Report,* columns *840–41* if he will make a statement regarding his Department's expenditure on special advisers in each of the last three financial years and for the financial year 1979–80.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on 19 December, *Official Report,* column *937.*

Appointments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his definition of extreme political views as used in his answer to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 30 March 1994, *Official Report,* column *829.*

Mr. Lang: I used the term in its generally understood sense, but it would include membership of, or support for, a political organisation which was generally regarded as being of an extremist nature.

Isle of Lewis

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funds from European Resources have been received for road projects on the Isle of Lewis in 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Stewart: No funds have been awarded for road projects on the Isle of Lewis in 1993–94 from the European regional development fund, the principal source of European funding for infrastructure projects. It is too early to say what projects might come forward through the Highlands and Islands objective 1 programme during 1995.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To aks the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Lang: Most of the changes to my Department's telecommunications' networks have been carried out free of charge by the companies responsible for maintaining our telephone systems. At one site a charge of £1,000 was incurred.

It is not possible to give an estimate of the cost of alternations to items of stationery, but because the changes were publicised widely well in advance it has been possible in many cases to incorporate the new codes when placing routine orders for new stationery. Some staff time has been or will be devoted to reprogramming fax machines etc.

Vandalism

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of vandalism were reported to the procurator fiscal but not proceeded with in the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Programme Making (Scotland)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of his correspondence with the Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation about programme making in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 2 December 1994]:* It is not my right hon. Friend's normal practice to make available private correspondence between himself and outside organisations. However, given the public interest in the future of BBC production in Scotland and the nature of the correspondence, he has agreed to make an exception in this case. Accordingly, a copy of my right hon. Friend's letter of 28 October 1994 to Mr. Birt and, with Mr. Birt's agreement, a copy of his reply dated 2 November have today been placed in the Library.

Housing List Applications

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applicants were waiting on the housing lists of each of the development corporations in each financial year since 1979.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* The information is not held centrally.

Departmental Telephone Calls

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on telephone charges and how many telephone calls have been made by his Department for each of the last five years.

Mr. Lang: The information on telephone charges for calls made via both the public service telephone network and the government telephone network by all Scottish Office Departments is set out in the table.

	Public service telephone network £	*Government telephone network* £	*Total* £
1989–90	645,000	339,000	984,000
1990–91	615,000	343,000	958,000
1991–92	675,000	352,000	1,027,000
1992–93	755,000	366,000	1,121,000
1993–94	695,000	343,000	1,038,000

As call charges are levied by the volume of units used and not by the number of calls made, records on total numbers of calls are not maintained.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington, (Mr. Milburn) of 1 December, *Official Report*, columns *895–96*, if he will make a statement regarding his Department's expenditure on special advisers for each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *937*.

Management Systems

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he has given to introducing a MINIS-type—managerial information systems—management system to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I will be considering what changes I might make to my Department's planning and management information systems in the light of the fundamental expenditure review of the Department and the recommendations of the multidepartmental efficiency scrutiny of management information and planning systems. Both reviews are expected to report in the spring of 1995.

National Lottery

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will ensure that all the interest earned on money already collected by the National Lottery Charity Board for distribution to charities and voluntary organisations will be made available to those organisations.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes. The National Lottery etc. Act 1993 provides that interest earned on the proceeds of the national lottery is added to the national lottery distribution fund and attributed to each distributing body on a proportionate basis.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if interest earned on money already collected by the national lottery for distribution to charities and voluntary organisations will accrue to Camelot.

Mr. Dorrell: Interest earned on the proceeds of the national lottery will not accrue to Camelot. It is added to the national lottery distribution fund and attributed to each distributing body on an equitable basis.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will consider the abandonment of national lottery rollover prizes above £1 million or, when prizes have not been won, distributing the money to charities through a further draw from a list of registered charities.

Mr. Dorrell: The rollover of unwon jackpot prizes is a significant factor in maintaining public interest and participation in lotteries around the world. The Government believe that limiting rollover in the UK to a maximum of three consecutive times will balance the aim of maintaining interest in the lottery with the need to put an upper ceiling on jackpot prizes. Returns to good causes would suffer if interest in playing the national lottery generated by jackpot prizes were to decline.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to ensure the national lottery prize winners can remain anonymous if that is their wish.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 December 1994]:* Under section 11 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, the director-general of the national lottery has been directed to include in the licence to run the national lottery a condition that the identity of any person who has won a prize in any constituent game will not be disclosed by the licensee without the written consent of that person.

Recent disclosures are being considered both by the director-general and the Press Complaints Commission.

School Sports

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the Government's interdepartmental review on school sport and physical education was initiated; how many officials have been involved and from which Departments those officials were drawn; when an announcement is due to be made; and if he expects to make that announcement himself.

Mr. Sproat: This Department and the Department for Education are considering ways of strengthening competitive school sport as part of their ongoing involvement in this policy area. The bulk of the work falls to six officials who also undertake a range of other duties. Other staff in DNH and DFE and other interested Departments are being consulted as appropriate. The timing and form of any announcement has yet to be decided.

Channel 4

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what alternatives to the current formula for funding Channel 4 television are being considered by him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I am considering the proposals which have been put to me by Channel 4 and the views of others with an interest.

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to reconsider the funding of Channel 4 television; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I am considering the proposals which have been put to me by Channel 4 and the views of others with an interest.

Broadcasting

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of programme time transmitted by BSkyB consists of material originated outside the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Information in the form requested is not available.

Article 4 of the EC broadcasting directive—89/552/EC—requires member states to ensure, where practicable, that broadcasters reserve for European works a majority of their transmission time, subject to the exclusion of certain types of programming such as news, sport and game shows. Member states are further required to report to the Commission every two years on the application of the article. The table shows the performance achieved by the BSkyB channels which were in operation during the period 3 October 1991 to 31 December 1992, as notified to the Commission in the UK's first monitoring report published on 4 November 1993.

My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), commented on the report in a written answer on the same day to a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), *Official Report*, 4 November 1993, column *310*. The action which my predecessor announced that the Department would be taking continues, and I shall make a further statement in due course.

European works broadcast by individual BSkyB channels operating from 3 October 1991 to 31 December 1992

Channel	*Percentage of total qualifying transmission time*
The Movie Channel	16.4
Sky Movies	13.7
Sky Movies Gold	19.1
Sky News	64.3
Sky One	8.5
Sky Sports	65.2

Charities Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give assurances that the interest earned on money already collected for distribution to charities and voluntary organisations will be made available to the charities fund.

Mr. Dorrell: Interest earned on the proceeds of the national lottery is added to the national lottery distribution fund and attributed to each distributing body on an equitable basis. All interest is therefore available for distribution to good causes. Twenty per cent. of the national lottery distribution fund will be available to the National Lottery Charities Board. Other charities and voluntary organisations connected with sports, arts, and heritage will also benefit from lottery proceeds.

Assets in lieu of Tax

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the assets received by his Department in lieu of tax for the current financial year and for the years 1992-93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Dorrell: The assets my Department has accepted in lieu of tax in the current financial year are as follows:

Picasso painting—'Tete de Femme 1924'
Picasso drawing—'Tete de Femme 1937'
Picasso vase—'Artist at his Easel'
Klee drawing—'Contraholz Solo'
George I silver kettle and stand
Ferneley painting—'Council of Horses'
Riding tack from Calke Abbey
Scott painting—'Black Painting 1958'
Amigoni painting—'Dido and Aeneas'
Collection of architectural drawings related to Nostell Priory
Benthall Hall chattels
The Fairfax Archive
Two busts by Flaxman and Chantrey
The Fitzherbert papers
The building No.2 Willow Road, Hampstead
The studio of F E McWilliam
The Acland Archive
Castle Fraser chattels

For the previous years, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) on 31 March 1994, *Official Report*, columns *978–79*) and 23 April 1993, column *226*.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his

Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of National Heritage will not incur any significant additional costs as a result of the changes to the national telephone dialling codes.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 22 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *111*.

Admission Fees

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the admission fees charged by British museums and historic royal palaces in each of the years since 1979 and which charged concessionary admission fees.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

York Stone and Cobbles

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to introduce measures to combat the theft of York stone and cobbles.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no such plans. A range of measures to prevent the theft of vulnerable paved surfaces is already available to local authorities and other owners. These include increased security lighting, closed-circuit television and neighbourhood watch schemes. It is important that crime prevention measures in historic town centres and conservation areas respect the character of the area.

Adrian Spencer

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet Mr. Adrian Spencer to discuss amateurism in rugby union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: I have no plans to meet Mr. Spencer.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to meet the Rugby Football Union to discuss the case of Adrian Spencer.

Mr. Sproat: I have no plans to meet the Rugby Football Union to discuss the case of Adrian Spencer.

Rugby

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for legislation to give players the right to play both rugby union and rugby league.

Mr. Sproat: The Government have no plans for introducing legislation. The rules and regulations of independent and properly constituted governing bodies of sport are a matter for them. My views on this issue are well known.

Market Testing

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list those services that have been market tested by his Department and won by the private sector, indicating the organisation that won the tender and its value.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 December 1994]:* To date, no services have been market tested by this Department, although a number of activities have been contracted out to the private sector as a matter of policy. Information on new tests is published in the market testing bulletin each month. A copy of this is placed in the Library.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department (i) hold open meetings, (ii) conduct public consultation exercises, (iii) conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, (iv) publish a register of members' interests, (v) publish agendas for meetings and (vi) publish the minutes of meetings; and whether this is in each case *(a)* under a statutory requirement or *(b)* voluntary.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* On point (i), I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State on 27 July 1993, *Official Report*, column *763-64*. On points (ii) and (iii), the advisory committee on the public lending right has undertaken consultation on reference books. My Department has undertaken consultation with the art trade on behalf of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art. The Theatres Trust also consults with outside interests. The regional councils for sport and recreation also conduct consultation exercises. On points (iv), (v) and (vi), the answer is none.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State made clear on 2 November 1993—*Official Report*, column *97-8*—all appointments are made in accordance with guidance provided by Cabinet Office and the Treasury, which requires Ministers to satisfy themselves that no conflict of interest arises.

EDUCATION

School Meals

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils aged *(a)* under seven, *(b)* between seven and 11 and *(c)* over 11 years of age, in each local authority area in England received (i) school meals and (ii) pre-school meals.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the number of school meals taken by pupils in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in each local education authority in England in January 1994 is shown in the table. Information is not collected centrally on the take-up of school meals according to pupils' ages or in respect of the level of provision of school meals prior to the start of the school day.

Numbers of day-pupils taking free and paid school meals in maintained schools in England—January 1994

Local education authority	Nursery and primary	Secondary
Corporation of London	158	—
Camden	6,974	4,736
Greenwich	10,946	5,200
Hackney	11,782	4,118
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,747	4,199
Islington	10,571	3,118
Kensington and Chelsea	4,249	2,081
Lambeth	13,079	4,075
Lewisham	12,874	5,049
Southwark	14,664	5,792
Tower Hamlets	15,262	6,455
Wandsworth	10,744	5,320
Westminster	6,696	4,018
Barking and Dagenham	7,296	3,062
Barnet	11,578	10,629
Bexley	7,464	4,270
Brent	10,984	4,563
Bromley	8,967	8,287
Croydon	13,197	7,255
Ealing	10,450	6,919
Enfield	9,711	6,628
Haringey	11,250	4,912
Harrow	1,538	3,103
Havering	7,951	4,922
Hillingdon	3,153	5,359
Hounslow	8,725	7,629
Kingston upon Thames	1,494	2,575
Merton	5,260	2,737
Newham	12,426	4,127
Redbridge	9,797	6,436
Richmond upon Thames	3,990	2,941
Sutton	5,501	5,514
Waltham Forest	10,914	5,482
Birmingham	57,414	38,742
Coventry	12,129	6,151
Dudley	11,222	7,338
Sandwell	12,994	5,355
Solihull	9,646	6,097
Walsall	11,010	9,534
Wolverhampton	10,920	6,064
Knowsley	9,856	4,458
Liverpool	28,663	15,538
St. Helens	7,452	6,681
Sefton	10,469	8,443
Wirral	15,996	9,952
Bolton	14,934	9,781
Bury	8,986	4,845
Manchester	31,966	11,742
Oldham	15,048	8,522
Rochdale	12,432	6,444
Salford	15,298	4,785
Stockport	11,955	8,873
Tameside	12,030	6,497
Trafford	7,207	6,915
Wigan	13,059	8,537
Barnsley	10,865	5,495
Doncaster	20,008	10,463
Rotherham	12,392	4,412
Sheffield	19,845	11,030
Bradford	21,378	24,339
Calderdale	10,710	5,282
Kirklees	21,461	9,675
Leeds	32,138	19,354
Wakefield	12,675	5,887
Gateshead	10,742	2,583
Newcastle upon Tyne	13,874	7,729
North Tyneside	8,942	6,550
South Tyneside	10,454	4,493
Sunderland	16,611	5,626
Isles of Scilly	62	49
Avon	34,730	18,630
Bedfordshire	24,683	20,713
Berkshire	23,039	19,421
Buckinghamshire	6,494	8,747
Cambridgeshire	24,007	13,364
Cheshire	37,448	30,965
Cleveland	37,517	14,582
Cornwall	17,108	15,240
Cumbria	21,183	16,741
Derbyshire	45,941	36,572
Devon	31,987	30,391
Dorset	4,254	14,105
Durham	37,023	15,187
East Sussex	22,514	12,316
Essex	47,946	35,338
Gloucestershire	12,452	10,215
Hampshire	48,253	28,470
Hereford and Worcester	8,400	15,251
Hertfordshire	40,492	28,858
Humberside	48,464	29,348
Isle of Wight	3,354	4,471
Kent	52,317	40,914
Lancashire	58,919	44,315
Leicestershire	32,602	24,727
Lincolnshire	4,367	14,978
Norfolk	25,741	13,836
North Yorkshire	26,083	22,807
Northamptonshire	7,626	14,117
Northumberland	12,125	14,835
Nottinghamshire	42,364	24,073
Oxfordshire	14,431	10,433
Shropshire	18,248	13,604
Somerset	6,238	9,635
Staffordshire	48,268	24,216
Suffolk	18,188	17,816
Surrey	36,255	20,432
Warwickshire	18,472	10,011
West Sussex	21,725	11,809
Wiltshire	15,971	13,703
England	1,886,464	1,250,958

GCSE Papers

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have had GCSE papers re-marked by examination boards in the last year; what has been the outcome; and what investigations his Department has undertaken.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not held by the Department. Grading and re-grading are matters for the individual GCSE examining groups.

School Inspections

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) for how many years past reports from Her Majesty's inspectorate are kept on file and available for inspection;

(2) what are her plans for making available past reports of Her Majesty's inspectorate.

Mr. Forth: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the independent Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Faversham College, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she intends to announce her decision on the application for voluntary-aided status made by Faversham college, Bradford; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend will announce her decision on Faversham college's proposals as soon as possible.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about the plans of her Department to make information available on the Internet and the documents which she intends to be made available on the Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "Open.Gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has noted with interest the recent launch of the open government information service by CCTA, the Government centre for information systems. The Department is keen to play its full part in making information available electronically where appropriate and is considering what material might most helpfully be made accessible via this service.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend and other Ministers in the Department use electronic mail daily to communicate with officials in London and Darlington.

The possibilities for extending existing links to connect to non-departmental public bodies and agencies in the education sector are currently under consideration.

"15,000 Hours"

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will authorise publication of the names of the schools involved in the research led by Professor Michael Rutter published as "15,000 Hours".

Mr. Forth: No. It was agreed between all parties before the research began that the schools would never be identified or identifiable in any report which was to be written.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by her Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost her Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Forth: Additional departmental costs as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year are estimated to be £2,000. No further expenditure in addition to this is anticipated.

Further Education Funding Council

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of the Further Education Funding Council's budget supports institutions in Hampshire.

Mr. Boswell: The total amount of recurrent funding allocated by the Further Education Funding Council for the academic year 1994–95 is £2,610.8 million, of which £109.5 million was allocated to institutions in Hampshire.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the total annual budget for the Further Education Funding Council for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Boswell: The total annual budget for the Further Education Funding Council for the financial year 1994–95 is £2,814.5 million.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total expenditure by grant-maintained schools in Hampshire in the financial year 1993–94; and what is the forecast expenditure for 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information relating to expenditure in GM schools is held by the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to write to the hon. Member.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the total pupil numbers in schools in 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The total numbers of pupils in all schools in England in January 1993 and January 1994 were 7,747,000 and 7,882,000 respectively.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) 1 December, *Official Report* column *863*, if she will make a statement regarding her Department's expenditure on special advisers in each of the last three financial years and for the financial year 1979–80.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *937*.

TRANSPORT

Roads and Airports (EC Funding)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the total amounts received from the European Commission for road building and airports in each of the last five years.

Mr. Watts: Figures available for European regional development fund and transport infrastructure grant

receipts for road and airport related projects in England are as follows:

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
ERDF (£ million rounded)					
Airports	[1]1.3	2.8	6.3	4.5	1.8
Roads	52.5	23.4	62.2	50.2	25.1
TIG (£ million)					
Roads	2.25	0.12	5.85	0.6	1.05

[1] From 1 April to 31 December 1990.

Departmental Telephone Calls

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on telephone charges and how many telephone calls have been made by his Department for each of the last five years.

Mr. Norris: The answer is:

	£
1990–91	4,479,004
1991–92	4,859,147
1992–93	5,580,202
1993–94	5,183,307

Full details for 1989–90 are not available.

Details of the number of calls made per year are not held centrally.

Vehicle Inspections

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of spot-checks undertaken on heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles for the west midlands area for each of the last five years.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 10 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of vehicle spot-checks undertaken on heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and public service vehicles (PSVs) for the West Midlands Traffic Area for each of the last five years.

The table below outlines both roadworthiness checks (the mechanical condition of the vehicle) and traffic enforcement checks (the use to which the vehicle is put i.e. drivers' hours, operator licensing etc).

Roadworthiness

HGV		PSV	
Years	*Number of spot checks*	*Years*	*Number of spot checks*
1993–94	15,348	1993–94	3,491
1992–93	10,145	1992–93	2,471
1991–92	9,552	1991–92	2,403
1990–91	6,126	1990–91	1,370
1989–90	5,258	1989–90	1,497

Traffic enforcement

HGV		PSV	
Year	*Number of spot checks*	*Year*	*Number of spot checks*
1993–94	19,212	1993–94	2,337
1992–93	17,239	1992–93	2,489
1991–92	20,938	1991–92	1,882
1990–91	22,240	1990–91	1,754
1989–90	23,570	1989–90	1,473

I hope this information is sufficient to answer your query. More information on checks in the West Midlands and elsewhere is available in the Traffic Commissioner Annual Reports and the Licensing Authority Annual Reports, copies of which should be available through the House of Commons Library.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the Vehicle Inspectorate testing stations in the west midlands traffic area, the number of staff employed in each of the last five years.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 10 January 1995:

Vehicle Inspectorate Staff Employed in the West Midlands Traffic Area.

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of staff that have been employed by the Vehicle Inspectorate in the West Midlands Traffic Area during the last five years.

The table below gives a breakdown of the total number of staff by year, by a broad categorisation of employment. The attached table gives more detailed information by testing station location and includes staff working on both the Vehicle Testing and Road Transport Enforcement side of the Inspectorate's work. It has not been possible to separate out the VI staff located at testing stations without disproportionate cost.

	Technical	*Administrative*	*Industrial*	*Total*
1990–91	51	31	25	107
1991–92[1,2]	84	37	23	144
1992–93[2]	81	37	22	140
1993–94	75	36	22	133
1994–95	73	31	20	124

(Numbers are full-time equivalent and have been rounded to the nearest unit)

[1] The increase in Technical and Administrative staff in 1993–94 results from the amalgamation of the traffic Examiners organisation into the Vehicle Inspectorate as at 1 April 1991.

[2] It has not been possible to separate South Wales Traffic Area staff out from the West Midlands Traffic area in the first 2 years following the amalgamation.

I hope this information is sufficient but, if you have any further questions about the Inspectorate's operations, please contact me at the above address.

Heavy Goods Vehicle Testing Station	Year	Numbers of Staff: Technical	Admin	Industrial	Total
Shrewsbury	1990–91	4	5	3	[2]12
	1991–92	4	2	3	[2]9
	1992–93	5	2	3	[2]10
	1993–94	3	2	3	8
	1994–95	3	2	3	8
Birmingham	1990–91	17	9	7	[2]33
	1991–92	18	9	6	[2]33
	1992–93	16	9	6	[2]31
	1993–94	7	5	6	18
	1994–95	7	3	6	16
Wolverhampton	1990–91	14	8	9	[2]31
	1991–92	15	8	7	[2]30
	1992–93	15	8	6	[2]29
	1993–94	7	4	6	17
	1994–95	6	3	5	14
Stoke	1990–91	16	7.5	6.5	[2]30
	1991–92	15	5.5	6.5	[2]27
	1992–93	15	6	7	[2]28
	1993–94	5	5	7	17
	1994–95	5	5	6	16

In addition to the above numbers of staff located in VI offices at HGV testing stations, the following are located in other VI offices in the West Midlands traffic area.

	Year	Technical	Admin	Industrial	Total
Other Vehicle Inspectorate offices[1]	1990–91	0	1	0	1
	1991–92	32	13	0	[3]45
	1992–93	30	13	0	[3]43
	1993–94	52	21	0	[3]73
	1994–95	52	18	0	[3]70

[1] Includes some staff employed in the South Wales Traffic Area. It is not possible to separate out West Midlands.

[2] Includes staff working on the Road Traffic Enforcement side of the Inspectorate's work.

[3] Includes staff located in VI offices at HGV testing stations.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list each multi-agency road check undertaken on HGV and public service vehicles and the number of vehicles inspected together with the number of those receiving prohibition or defect notices for the west midlands area for each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 10 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding the number of multi-agency checks undertaken on heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), and passenger carrying vehicles (PCVs), and the number of vehicles inspected together with the number of those receiving prohibition or defect notices carried out in the West Midlands Traffic Area during the last 12 months.

Unfortunately not all of the information you require is available. A total of 15 checks were carried out over the period which resulted in 1,433 vehicles being inspected. I have attached a table which provides a breakdown of the checks, I am unable to provide details of how many prohibition or defect notices were issued as a result of these specific checks as such information is not recorded in our management information system and any additional information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

If you have any further questions about the Inspectorate's operations, please contact me at the above address.

Multi agency checks conducted in the West Midlands traffic area December 1993–November 1994

Date	Number of multi-agency checks	Number of vehicles inspected
December 1993	0	0
January 1994	1	10
February 1994	1	10
March 1994	1	41
April 1994	1	39
May 1994	2	262
June 1994	1	98
July 1994	2	186
August 1994	1	177
September 1994	2	100
October 1994	1	420
November 1994	2	90
Total	15	1,433

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy and powers to order random and regular safety inspections of public service vehicles; and what plans he has to increase such checks.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Each year the Secretary of State approves a programme of safety inspections on public service vehicles, which includes a target number of random and regular safety checks undertaken on his behalf by traffic and vehicle examiners from the Vehicle Inspectorate. The programme includes provision for traffic commissioners to request additional safety inspections where required for specific purposes. The number of inspections is kept under review and may be adjusted as necessary.

Mr. David Porter : To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many public service vehicles and minibuses carrying school children have been found to be defective in regular and random inspections in the last two years for which figures are available in *(a)* Suffolk, *(b)* Norfolk and *(c)* England and Wales; and what action has been taken in each case.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. David Porter, dated 10 January 1995:

School bus checks

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about checks on public service vehicles (PSVs) and minibuses carrying school children in Norfolk, Suffolk and England and Wales. Unfortunately, whilst we collect management information on checks on PSVs including any follow-up action, we do not distinguish between those carrying school children and others. The Inspectorate is also unable to provide data on a county by county basis as it is collected by Traffic Areas which do not relate to county boundaries.

The table attached gives the number of PSVs inspected at roadside checks during 1992–293 and 1993–94 and the number of immediate and delayed prohibitions issued. Additional information can only be provided at a disproportionate cost.

If you have nay further questions about the Inspectorate's operations, please contact me at the above address.

PSV spot checks 1992–93 and 1993–94

Traffic area	1992–93 Number of PSVs inspected	1992–93 Immediate prohibitions	1992–93 Delayed prohibitions	1993–94 Number of PSVs inspected	1993–94 Immediate prohibitions	1993–94 Delayed prohibitions
Scotland	4,059	264	157	4,292	234	130
S. Western	4,813	245	135	5,191	316	170
N. Eastern	4,237	138	90	4,604	277	261
S. Wales	1,853	110	117	2,035	81	79
West Midlands	2,471	68	50	3,491	86	75
Western	2,883	139	146	2,947	89	128
Eastern	2,995	124	92	3,060	150	99
S. Eastern	6,231	211	280	4,066	164	255
Total	29,542	1,299	1,067	29,686	1,397	1,197

Transport Research Laboratory

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was allocated for seedcorn research to the Transport Research Laboratory during *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the three previous financial years.

Mr. Norris: The answer is:

(a) The Department of Transport has allocated £500,000 to the Transport Research Laboratory for seedcorn research in the current financial year 1994–95.

(b) The amounts allocated previously were:

in the year 1993–94, £640,000;

in the year 1992–93, £800,000;

in the year 1991–92, £550,000.

Blackwall Tunnel

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) who in his Department receives regular reports on significant interruptions to the north-bound traffic intending to use the Blackwall tunnel;

(2) if he will estimate the cost-benefit ratio of staffing a special unit to react to indications from detection equipment by diverting over-height vehicles away from the north-bound Blackwall tunnel before traffic is blocked;

(3) how often drivers or operators of over-sized vehicles are charged with an offence if they block the flow of traffic north-bound through the Blackwall tunnel;

(4) what is his Department's responsibility for *(a)* the north-bound Blackwall tunnel and *(b)* its approach road;

(5) how long it takes on average to unblock traffic at the north-bound Blackwall tunnel after an over-height vehicle blockage.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Peter Bottomley dated 10 January 1995:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Transport to reply to your recent parliamentary questions about the Blackwall Tunnel, as you have raised a number of operational matters that are now the responsibility of the Highways Agency. The Highways Agency acts in these matters on behalf of the Secretary of State who remains the Highway Authority for both the Blackwall Tunnel and its approach roads.

The delays at the northbound Blackwall Tunnel are often, but not always, caused by overheight vehicles stopped in the tunnel approach slope by automatically triggered traffic signals. Each incident is dealt with by police officers under the direction of the East London Traffic Control Centre (ELTCC) and takes about fifteen minutes to clear. It is usually possible for ELTCC to get one lane of traffic moving within a few minutes using a CCTV and loudspeaker system. The offending vehicle must not be reversed until traffic police arrive at the scene. A dedicated unit situated at the approach to the tunnel would have to be staffed by police as only they have the powers to stop and direct traffic. The police, however, share my view that such an arrangement would have few benefits over the present system. A large number of tall vehicles legitimately use Tunnel Avenue as the only access from the south to the northern tip of the Greenwich Peninsular. These drivers are therefore perfectly entitled to use the A102 to the Blackwall Tunnel before turning off adjacent to the tunnel approach slope, and it would be impossible for an officer to separate out those heading for the peninsular from the real offenders until the point that they are stopped now.

The ELTCC prepare a daily report on incidents for the Highways Agency's office in Docklands where staff are able to monitor incidents on a CCTV link. There are usually between 50 and 60 incidents a month. About 70% of these offenders are processed through the courts or issued with a fixed penalty notice. The balance, which tend to be those only slightly overheight, receive a verbal warning. The police also write to all the haulage companies concerned.

These measures have reduced the number of incidents and have avoided any damage to the fabric of the tunnel itself. We are however continually looking for further ways of improving the situation, for example, we are looking into the feasibility of providing an escape ramp to avoid the need for offending vehicles to have to reverse out of the Tunnel approach. But it is too early yet to say what the outcome will be.

I do hope that this answers the points you raised with the Secretary of State, but please contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Youth Training Scheme

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was spent by his Department on the youth training scheme during *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the three previous financial years.

Mr. Norris: The Department has spent £35,739.38 to date in the current financial year on the youth training scheme. Expenditure in 1993–94, 1992–93 and 1991–92 was £76,237.19, £85,287.85 and £103,652.42 respectively.

Preferred Carrier Status

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servants' travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Norris: Each Government Department is responsible for obtaining value for money for its own expenditure on overseas travel. My Department has not granted preferred carrier status to any airline.

River Thames

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the criteria or basis used in the estimate of capital cost of *(a)* the river-bus vessels for 62 passengers and *(b)* larger vessels for 200 passengers as mentioned on page 45 of the report of his River Thames working group.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* I am having the data on costs verified and will write to the hon. Member very shortly.

Motor Insurance

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken following the report of the Association of British Insurers, the Motor Insurance Bureau and Lloyds Motor Underwriters on measures to combat motor insurance fraud.

Mr. Norris: Departmental officials have been involved in discussions with the insurance industry since July. Evasion is a complex issue with implications across several Departments. We are looking at the feasibility of a number of possible measures to combat this serious offence. We hope to have reached positive conclusions in the course of the next few months.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of uninsured motorists.

Mr. Norris: In 1993, there were 281,136 convictions in England and Wales for driving without insurance. The insurance industry estimates that 4 to 6 per cent. of drivers are uninsured and a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report also estimates 6 per cent.

Driving Standards Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the current chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency achieved his performance bonus this year; and what is his salary as the chief executive of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Mr. Norris: The current chief executive of the Driving Standards Agency achieved a performance bonus of £2,934 in respect of the financial year 1993–94. His salary as chief executive of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency will be £52,704 per annum.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the current chief executive of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency achieved his performance bonus this year; and what is his current salary as head of the renewing of the traffic area office network.

Mr. Norris: The current chief executive of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency earned a non-consolidated performance bonus of £6,762 in recognition of the achievement of the agency's performance targets for the financial year 1993–94. This was in place of the normal personal performance pay award arrangements normally applicable to civil servants at the same grade. On 3 January he began a review of the traffic area network and his salary will be £54,118 per annum.

Road Accidents

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was *(a)* the cost of road accidents in 1993 in England and Wales and *(b)* his Department's expenditure on related research in that year; and what is the planned spending for 1994 and 1995.

Mr. Norris: The estimated total cost of injury road accidents in England and Wales for 1993 is £8.1 billion. This is the cost-benefit value of the total benefits which would be obtained from the prevention of road accidents.

Expenditure on road and vehicle safety research in 1993–94 was £10.4 million and the planning budget is £10.08 million for both 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Taxis

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to the regulation of hackney carriage and private hire cabs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 6 December, column *181*.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *874-75*, to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) what was the date of his private visit to Newbury; how long he spent on his visit; what he saw; what other options he has asked the Highways Agency to explore; and which of the requested options has not been already considered.

Dr. Mawhinney: I visited the Newbury area on 28 November 1994 for about three hours travelling on the A34 from the north and south through the centre of Newbury. I also visited a number of sites to the west of the town to view parts of the published bypass route, as part of my consideration of the proposal. I have asked the Highways Agency to review the options to relieve congestion in Newbury as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost of the 1988 inspector's inquiry into the route of the A34 Newbury bypass; and how many man hours of *(a)* the inspector's and *(b)* other officials' time were involved.

Dr. Mawhinney: The recorded costs of the 1988 A34 Newbury bypass public inquiry total about £140,000. This sum includes the cost of the inspector, his traffic assessor, the Department's counsel and the physical arrangements for the inquiry but excludes salary costs of others preparing for and attending the inquiry for which records are not available.

The inspector and his assessor spent about 1,230 and 640 hours respectively in connection with the inquiry. The number of hours spent by other officials preparing for and attending the inquiry have not been recorded.

London Transport

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are expected to be working for London Transport following the reorganisation announced by the chairman of London Transport on 24 November 1994.

Mr. Norris: London Transport is currently drawing up detailed plans for implementation of the reorganisation announced by its chairman. The management of London Transport will wish to discuss plans for staff reductions with staff representatives and trades unions. London Transport will not be able to give a reliable estimate of future staff numbers until its plans have been completed.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with London Transport over its staff reorganisation.

Mr. Norris: London Transport's plans for reorganisation are among a number of matters which my right hon. Friend and I have recently discussed with the chairman of London Transport.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the likely impact of reorganisation of London Transport of its ability to carry out its statutory duties under the London regional Transport Act 1984 and its wider statutory duty to plan for London's transport needs.

Mr. Norris: It is primarily for the chairman and board of London Transport to ensure that it is organised in a way which enables it to carry out its statutory duties appropriately and effectively. I am satisfied that they have taken full account of their statutory obligations in drawing up their reorganisation plans.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff worked for London Transport on 24 November 1994.

Mr. Norris: London Transport employed 20,437 permanent staff—full-time equivalent—on 12 November 1994, the nearest date for which figures are available from its management accounts.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Norris: Current projects and plans are likely to provide internal and external electronic mail facilities for my office and my headquarters staff during 1996, following relocation to a new HQ building in 1995.

Peakes Parkway

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding the funding for Humberside county council concerning phase 3 of the Peakes parkway.

Mr. Norris: The local transport capital settlement for 1995–96 which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 15 December, *Official Report*, columns *769-74* did not include funding for this scheme. Schemes are accepted for transport supplementary grant on condition that satisfactory progress is maintained and that costs do not rise excessively. In this case, the scheme was originally accepted for grant in 1993–94, when Humberside county council forecast that construction would start in September 1993. The latest forecast start date is December 1995. Meanwhile, the estimated cost of the scheme has already risen by over 10 per cent.

In the circumstances, my right hon. Friend and I did not consider it right to maintain our commitment to fund this scheme. This does not prevent its being resubmitted for funding in a future settlement.

North Circular Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department received regarding the Willoughby Lane gas works, offered as exchange open space in the north circular road widening project, and the 1988 public inquiry into the roads; and what response he has made.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr Harry Cohen, dated 10 January 1995:

Steven Norris has asked me to write to you about your question in the House in which you asked about representations received by the Department regarding the former Willoughby Lane gas works, being given as exchange land for public open space required for an improvement of the North Circular Road.

No representations were received regarding the exchange land, during the statutory period for objecting to the formal proposals, after the public inquiry or before the orders were made and the exchange land certificate issued.

The Agency has been in correspondence for some considerable time with the local authority, the London Borough of Enfield, about the details of the exchange land and associated technical matters. More recently, it has also been in correspondence with Enfield Friends of the Earth about the condition of the land at the former gas works. The Agency has supplied all the information requested for which it is responsible.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *1385*, to the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) concerning the extension of the docklands light railway from Beckton to Thamesmead, if he will obtain estimates of the cost of a single line and double line tunnel respectively for that railway across the Thames on an alignment close to that proposed for the east London river crossing.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 23 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *381*.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what future representation or information he has received concerning the sinking of the MV Derbyshire and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend is considering the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents' assessment of the sonar and video material provided by the International Transport Workers Federation, and whether further action needs to be taken.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling

codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Norris: An assessment covered changes to switch board arrangements and revised stationery. The additional costs will be about £3,000.

Children's Clothing (Reflective Material)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will consider making recommendations to manufacturers to incorporate reflective materials on garments, bags and rucksacks designed for use by children.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* We encourage retailers and manufacturers to consider marketing more outer garments with build-in visibility. A number of companies manufacture, market or promote fluorescent and reflective products for use by children. In October we carried out a "Be Safe. Be Seen" initiative with support from 3M(UK).

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the arrangements for joint safety meetings following the commission of the channel tunnel rail services.

Mr. Watts: Under the terms of the treaty of Canterbury the bi-national intergovernmental commission and safety authority are established for the lifetime of the concession agreement with the channel tunnel operators, Eurotunnel, and will continue to meet at regular intervals to consider safety and other matters.

Scottish Control Zone

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Scottish control zone and the Prestwick control zone were abolished; what was the reason for their abolition; and what consultations took place in advance of their decision.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Civil Aviation Authority has the responsibility for airspace planning. They advise that the Prestwick control zone—formally the Prestwick special rules zone—was abolished on 3 March 1993. On 3 March 1994 the Scottish Zone and parts of the Scottish terminal control area were abolished.

Reviews are routinely carried out on the use made of controlled airspace to identify those portions that are under-utilised or no longer serve the purpose for which they were established. This is in accordance with ministerial direction to the CAA and the national air traffic services. Such a review showed that the number of passenger public transport aircraft using Prestwick airport had declined to the level where the provision of controlled airspace was no longer necessary. After the review, NATS consulted the Prestwick airport operator, British Aerospace Flying College—the then principle user of Prestwick airport—the Ministry of Defence, and the National Air Traffic Management Advisory Committee, as well as its own Scottish air traffic control centre about the changes from late 1991 until early 1994.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the latest appraisal system supplied to immigration officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A list has been placed in the Library of the standard main tasks and performance levels against which managers assess the performance of immigration officers at ports.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether immigration officers have been given a quota for refusing foreign nationals entry to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no refusal quotas for immigration officers. All passengers are dealt with on their merits and in accordance with the immigration rules laid down by Parliament.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all operational targets which apply to the immigration service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Service standards are set for the immigration service relating to maximum passenger queuing times at ports of entry. These are set out in the service's published operating plan, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the tariff sentences he imposed on Abdul Qayyum Raja and Mohammed Riaz; what action he has taken in these matters following the judgment of the High Court on 16 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The judgment effectively requires the Secretary of State to reconsider the cases of these two prisoners, and to set a fresh tariff for each. He will do so following receipt of any further representations which they may wish to make in the light of further disclosure which has been given to them. We are in correspondence with their legal representatives about these matters.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether immigration officers have been given a quota system for *(a)* interrogating or *(b)* refusing foreign nationals entry into the United Kingdom; whether their earnings are linked to such targets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no quotas of any kind for immigration officers. All passengers are dealt with on their merits and in accordance with the immigration rules laid down by Parliament.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals have been made against payments offered under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board since 1 April 1994; and what has been the administrative cost of processing those appeals.

Mr. Maclean: The tariff scheme started on 1 April 1994. Applications lodged before then are being dealt with by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. Applications lodged subsequently are being handled by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

CICB advises that at the end of December 1994 3,357 appeals had been lodged since 1 April 1994, all in respect of applications made before that date. Based on expenditure in 1993–94, the administrative cost of processing this number of appeals is likely to be about £2.5 million.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offers of payment were made by the criminal injuries compensation scheme in November; and in which of the tariff bands these awards fell.

Mr. Maclean: Five hundred and ninety five offers of award were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, under the tariff scheme. They fell into the following tariff bands:

Band	*Number of awards offered*
1	135
2	36
3	158
4	8
5	59
6	26
7	87
8	22
9	8
10	11
11	6
12	36
13	1
16	2

Additionally, offers of award were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in respect of residual cases lodged before 1 April 1994 under the former arrangements. The CICB is however, unable to say how many such offers were made in November 1994.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice his Department is giving applicants to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority about the outcome of their applications in the event of a legal challenge to the establishment of the authority being successful.

Mr. Maclean: Applications under the scheme are considered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, not the Home or Scottish Offices. In a standard notice sent to all claimants offered a tariff award, CICA explains that, pending resolution of the legal challenge, the award is being made on a provisional, without prejudice basis, and that if the tariff scheme is withdrawn or altered as a result of the court proceedings the application would be reassessed.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of administering the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in 1993–94; and what proportion of that cost was devoted to dealing with appeals.

Mr. Maclean: The provisional outturn cost of administering the CICB in 1993–94 was £17.3 million, of which an estimated £3.4 million—19.6 per cent.—was devoted to hearings administration.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many payments were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each month from April 1992 to April 1994.

Mr. Maclean: The total number of awards made by the CICB in the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1994 was 77,273. The CICB is unable to provide a breakdown by month.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many payments were made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board between *(a)* 1 April 1993 and 1 April 1994 and *(b)* 1 April 1994 and 21 November 1994 in the bands: (i) £1,000 to £4,999, (ii) £5,000 to £9,999, (iii) £10,000 to £24,999 and (iv) above £25,000.

Mr. Maclean: The following information has been provided by the CICB:

a) payments made between 1 April 1993 and 31 March 1994

32,345 between £1,000–£4,999

3,398 between £5,000–£9,999

2,139 over £10,000.

b) payments made between 1 April 1994 and 31 October 1994 (figures not available after that date)

10,801 between £1,000–£4,999

1,306 between £5,000–£9,999

975 over £10,000

No further breakdown of payments exceeding £10,000 is readily available.

In addition the CICA made two payments in the period 1 April 1994 to 31 October 1994, one in the category £1,000 to £4,999, the other in the category £5,000 to £9,999.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to publish each month, the number of offers made by the criminal injuries compensation scheme.

Mr. Maclean: No. Information about the number of offers made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority will be published each year in the authority's annual report. We see no need for more frequent publication.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of the Home Department what plans he has for uprating the level of compensation payable by the criminal injuries compensation scheme.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made during debate on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill on 20 October 1994, *Official Report*, column 452.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total level of section 11 expenditure in London in 1994–95; what level is planned for 1995–96; and how it will be allocated.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The table shows budget allocations of section 11 grant which have been notified to local authorities and other recipients in the Greater London area in relation to their expenditure in 1994–95.

Allocations for existing projects which will still be running in 1995–96 should be notified to grant recipients shortly. The methodology for calculating these allocations is currently the subject of consultation with local authority associations. Applications for grant for new projects starting in 1995–96 are under consideration.

	Section 11 allocation 1994–95
London Borough Councils	
Barking and Dagenham	230,860
Barnet	748,243
Bexley	100,138
Brent	1,742,385
Camden	1,111,346
Croydon	949,775
Ealing	2,615,675
Enfield	1,058,164
Greenwich	1,329,673
Hackney	3,147,620
Hammersmith	713,289
Haringey	2,604,874
Harrow	556,992
Havering	39,169
Hillingdon	317,055
Hounslow	1,389,502
Islington	1,434,673
Kensington and Chelsea	899,845
Kingston	105,071
Lambeth	1,109,603
Lewisham	1,637,467
London Boroughs Grants Unit	123,071
Merton	490,246
Newham	2,181,976
Redbridge	918,005
Richmond	56,225
Southwark	1,955,157
Sutton	46,902
Tower Hamlets	6,826,782
Waltham Forest	1,585,015
Wandsworth	1,396,800
Westminster	1,498,548
Sub-total	40,920,146
Grant maintained schools	
Burntwood (Wandsworth)	55,687
Chadwell Heath (Redbridge)	15,047
Claremont (Harrow)	13,629
Copeland (Brent)	33,860
Dormers Wells Junior School (Ealing)	41,425
Graveney (Wandsworth)	69,720
Greenford (Ealing)	39,461
Hendon (Barnet)	28,041
London Oratory (Hammersmith and Fulham)	38,025
Northolt (Ealing)	5,379
Raines Foundation (Tower Hamlets)	27,146
St. Lukes (Kingston)	1,671
St. Francis Xavier (Wandsworth)	9,576
St. Thomas the Apostle College (Southwark)	10,322
Salesian School (Wandsworth)	28,010
Stratford (Newham)	54,277
Wood End (Ealing)	6,815
Sub-total	478,091
Further Education Colleges	
Barnet	59,505
Bexley	24,920
Croydon	77,665
Ealing	93,710
Enfield	111,567
Greenhill	162,085
Hackney	234,260
Hammersmith and West London	28,865
Hendon	128,419
Islington	67,102
Kensington and Chelsea	33,119
Kingsway	49,613
Leyton 6th Form	18,574
Newham	225,627
North East London	124,985
North West London	352,602
Southgate	49,649
Tower Hamlets	356,733
Uxbridge	51,481
Waltham Forest	35,591
Wandsworth	48,140
City of Westminster	44,189
Woolwich	24,583
Sub-total	2,402,984
Grand total	43,801,221

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what medical services are available to asylum seekers and others held in detention under immigration laws; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Detainees in immigration detention centres and Prison Service establishments have access on a daily basis to a doctor. There is also a nurse present daily at the Harmondsworth and Campsfield house detention centres. A detainee who requires further medical attention may be transferred to a prison or outside hospital.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum have been received from citizens of republics of the former Yugoslavia for each of the years 1992, 1993 and 1994; how many have been agreed; how many refused; and how many are still awaiting a decision.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on the number of applications for asylum received from nationals of the former Yugoslavia, and decisions made, for the years 1992, 1993 and until the end of November 1994 is given in the table. As at 30 November 1994, an estimated 6,200 applications for asylum from former Yugoslavs were outstanding.

In addition to consideration of asylum applications, the Government have, under arrangements announced in November 1992 and June 1993, offered to receive 1,000 particularly vulnerable individuals from the former Yugoslavia and those close dependants, an estimated 4,000 people in all. As at 9 January 1995, 836 particularly vulnerable individuals and 1,134 dependants had arrived under these arrangements. Prior to this, 68 sick and wounded ex-detainees from Bosnia arrived in September 1992.

Decisions[1] on applications[1] received for asylum from nationals of the former Yugoslavia in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, 1992 to end-November 1994

Number of principal applicants

	1992	*1993*	*[7]1994*
Asylum applications[2]	5,635	1,830	1,255
Decisions [2][3]	130	175	1,655
Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	*	–	25
Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4]	*	55	1,180
Refused asylum and ELR – after full consideration	–	10	350
Refused under para. 180F[5]	65	80	70
Refused on safe third country grounds[6]	60	30	25

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5, with '*' = 1 or 2.
[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year.
[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.
[5] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitation to interview to establish identity (para. 101 prior to 26 July 1993).
[6] Refused on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country.
[7] Figures up to end-November 1994.

West Midlands Police

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *379*, if he has asked for a report on the success of Operation Brink by the West Midlands police force.

Mr. Maclean: No. This is an operational matter that falls entirely within the responsibility of the chief constable.

Stefan Kiszko

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the outcome of the inquiry by the Lancashire police into the Stefan Kiszko case.

Mr. Maclean: A report was submitted to the Crown Prosecution Service, which announced on 11 May 1994 that Mr. Richard Holland, a former detective superintendent with West Yorkshire Constabulary, and Mr. Ronald Outteridge, a retired Home Office forensic scientist, are to be prosecuted on charges of perverting the course of justice.

Blood Sports

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to the cost of policing blood sport events.

Mr. Maclean: The deployment of police officers to specific duties is a matter for the chief officer of police. Details of the costs of policing field sports are not held centrally.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how may arrests have been made at blood sport events since the implementation of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of people arrested for specific offences is not collected centrally.

Information on cautioning and court proceedings data under sections 68 and 69—summary offences of aggravated trespass—of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 will not be available until autumn 1996.

Black People

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of black people in the United Kingdom were the victims of murder or homicide in the last year for which figures are available; and what information he has on the equivalent figure in the United States of America.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available centrally for England and Wales.

Figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and figures for Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Figures for the United States are, of course, a matter for the United States Government, but I understand that the proportion of black people in the United States of America who were victims of murder and non-negligent manslaughter in 1993 is 37 per 100,000 according to the United States Department of Justice. For comparison, the proportion of the total England and Wales population who were victims of currently recorded homicide during 1993 was 1.2 per 100,000.

Hampshire Police

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total expenditure for Hampshire police authority in 1994–95.

Mr. Maclean: The latest estimate of total current and capital expenditure by the Hampshire police authority in 1994–95 is £150.6 million.

Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the case of Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal, held in Bedford prison.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Proceedings in respect of Mr. Chahal's application to the European Commission of Human Rights concerning the decision to deport him from the United Kingdom are continuing. He will not be removed from the United Kingdom before completion of these proceedings. Mr. Chahal's detention is regularly reviewed, and my right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that it continues to be fully justified.

Prison Population

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the prison population broken down by security category, at the latest date available, for *(a)* Doncaster prison, *(b)* The Wolds prison and *(c)* the female wing at Durham prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmand, dated 10 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the prison population broken down by security category, at the latest date available, for *(a)* Doncaster prison, *(b)* The Wolds prison and *(c)* the female wing at Durham prison.

The information requested, as at 19 December 1994, is as follows:

	Adults						
	Cat A	*Cat B*	*Cat C*	*Cat D*	*Not yet categorised*	*Young offenders*	*Total*
Doncaster	0	10	61	39	256	368	734
The Wolds	0	16	62	35	179	0	292

Young offenders are only given a security category when Category A is applicable.

Unless Category A is applicable, adult male prisoners are not given a security category until after conviction and sentence.

There are 35 female prisoners held at Durham prison, including one Category A. Female prisoners are only given a security category when Category A is applicable.

ENVIRONMENT

Private Finance Initiative

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is now able to publish draft capital finance regulations relating to the measures under the Government's private finance initiative which he announced on 31 October 1994.

Mr. Curry: We have today issued for consultation to the local authority associations and to local authorities the draft of regulations which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment proposes to make under part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. We have asked for comments to be submitted by 13 February 1995. I have arranged for copies of the draft order, together with an explanatory guide, to be placed in the Library of the House.

The regulations provide:

—for two major relaxations in the rules governing local authority leasing of non-housing property, extending the revenue treatment of leases from three years to 10 years and enabling capital finance cover to be transferred from one lease to another on surrender or assignment;

—that notional receipts from disposals of assets to companies in return for shares will no longer require set aside; and

—that the reserved part of capital receipts from disposals of shares will be reduced from 75 per cent. to 50 per cent. if they were acquired before 10 March 1988 or acquired for the purposes of economic development, or if they are in a company connected with waste disposal or the provision of entertainment facilities.

Housing Associations, Gateshead

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the impact of current and projected future housing association funding both on housing and job creation opportunities in the Gateshead metropolitan borough area.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Housing Corporation estimates that allocations from its approved development programme in 1994–95 for new scheme approvals in the Gateshead metropolitan borough area will total some £2.5 million in 1994–95. Allocations issued for 1995–96 also amount to some £2.5 million. This is expected to enable 126 new social lettings to be approved in 1994–95, and 145 in 1995–96 as a result of the more cost effective use of resources. Information on jobs created by the approved development programme is not available.

Housing Corporation

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis he has made of the consequences of changes to the Housing Corporation's approved development programme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The public resources for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme in 1995–96 will amount to almost £1.2 billion. This is expected to provide some 52,000 new social lettings in 1995–96. We estimate that Housing Corporation and local authority expenditure, and the private finance they will attract, will produce some 180,000 new social lettings over the next three years.

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis he has conducted of the consequences to the construction industry resulting from changes in the Housing Corporation's approved development programme; and if he will make such information available.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Modest and sustained growth in the construction industry is expected to continue. The next stage of the construction industry report, which is produced jointly by the Department of the Environment and representatives of the construction industry, will be completed very soon. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the funding for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The public resources for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme in 1993–94 totalled some £1.8 billion enabling the Housing Corporation to provide 56,500 new social lettings in 1993–94. In 1994–95 public funding for the approved development programme will amount to some £1.5 billion, which the Housing Corporation estimates will, with more cost-effective use of public resources, provide over 60,000 new lettings.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total expenditure in Hampshire by the Housing Corporation for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Housing Corporation estimates that some £26 million of the Housing Corporation's capital budget for 1994–95 will be spent in Hampshire.

Building Control Fees

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he received from the

National House Building Council prior to his decision to increase local authority building control fees from 1 October.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Together with many other consultees, the NHBC responded with comments and suggestions on the Department's consultation letter of 30 March 1993 proposing changes to the fees regulations. It subsequently wrote three letters reinforcing points in its original submission.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what steps he took to consult on the level of local authority building control fees prior to their increase in 1 October; and what were the results of those consultations;

(2) what considerations led to the increase from 1 October of building control fees charged by local authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Preliminary discussions were held over a long period with local authority representatives. There followed a consultants' study into local authority fee income and costs. Based on the conclusions of the above discussions and on the results of the study, two public consultations were carried out into the form and fee levels for new regulations. The responses were considered by the building regulations advisory committee and by a working group made up of members of the committee and representatives of the local authority associations. In the light of these consultations, and the consideration of the responses, the Building (Prescribed Fees) Regulations 1994 were made.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received since announcing the increase in local authority building control fees.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has received 39 representations on local authority building control fees up to and including 6 January 1995. Twenty-four were principally about the level of increase in fees for new housebuilding, of which 20 were from local authorities. The remaining representations, largely from individuals, were about the size of the increase for all types of buildings or were concerned with the fee levels for house extensions or for commercial work.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what calculations he has made of the effect on local authority revenue of the increase in local authority building control fees in the light of the decision of the National House Building Council to freeze its fees.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. We propose to make arrangements to monitor the future levels of local authority fee income and costs without placing unnecessary burdens on local authorities. The level of fees charged by NHBC Building Control Services Limited is a matter for it.

Birds of Prey

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has consulted the National Council for Aviculture on the setting up of a DNA register for birds of prey; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department has not undertaken any specific consultations on the setting up of a DNA register for birds of prey. However, I explained in reply to the question from the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *1115-1116*, that the Department has established a working group to review the enforcement of wildlife controls. The future role of genetic testing in relation to the bird registration system is one of the issues being considered by this working group, on which the National Council for Aviculture is represented. I shall be making a further announcement about the use of DNA in the near future.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Sir Paul Beresford: About a third of the staff in my Department already have available to them electronic mail facilities for internal communication. A fully advanced office support system project is now under way which will, amongst other things, provide full electronic mail links across all areas of the Department, and the ability to communicate via external networks, during the next three years.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) on 30 November, *Official Report*, column *728*.

Water Companies

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what directives or advice have been given by his Department to the National Rivers Authority regarding non-prosecution of the privatised water companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: None. The National Rivers Authority has full discretion in using its enforcement powers in order to fulfil its role of protecting the water environment and dealing with pollution. The effectiveness of NRA enforcement action has contributed to continuing progress in improving water quality.

Home Owners

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many families who bought a home in the last two years included *(a)* one, *(b)* two and *(c)* three or more earners.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available estimates are of numbers of households in England with two or more people in them who in 1993–94 had bought a home in the previous two years. Of these, 230,000 had one person in employment, 720,000 had two persons in employment and 80,000 had three or more persons in employment. There

were also 290,000 purchasers who were one person households and were in employment.

These figures are from the "Survey of English Housing" and are subject to sampling error.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what was *(a)* the historic cost and *(b)* the cost at 1994 prices of the Rural Development Commission's (i) training workshops and (ii) total facility in Salisbury.

Mr. Atkins: The cost of the training workshops in 1994 prices is £40,612 with the total Rural Development Commission facility in Salisbury costing £207,816. This compares with the estimated cost of the workshops in 1988, the year in which the commission was established, of £37,420 against a total cost of £191,507.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the independent review of the Rural Development Commission'straining activities.

Mr. Atkins: The Rural Development Commission is required to carry out periodic value for money reviews of all its economic and social development programmes. As part of this process the commission engaged ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd to carry out a review of its training services which support economic development. I have today arranged for copies of ECOTEC's report of its review to be placed in the Library of each House.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date officials were informed by the Rural Development Commission of the possible winding down of their direct training commitment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Officials in the Department were informed that the rural development commissioners were considering various options for the future provision of training, including the possible winding down of the facilities at the commission's Salisbury offices, following the commissioners' meeting on 22 November 1994. A final decision has yet to be taken on the future of the direct training facilities. The commissioners are planning to discuss this issue further later this month.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the *(a)* marginal cost and *(b)* total cost of training a craftsman in each of the skills offered on the various training schemes of the Rural Development Commission based in Salisbury.

Mr. Atkins: The marginal and fixed costs are as follows:

Discipline	*New entrants training scheme*		*Open courses*	
	Marginal cost of training per apprentice (NETS)	*Total cost of training per apprentice including fixed costs*	*Marginal cost per student*	*Total cost per student*
Woodwork	3,876	4,956	361	771
Forgework	6,004	8,178	146	360
Furniture	8,241	9,969	68	303
Upholstery	3,030	5,162	386	865
Saddlery	4,438	6,998	71	364
Thatching (nets only)	3,500	3,500	0	0
GRP plastics	3,129	4,919	165	558
ENG fabrication (nets only)	3,042	3,042	0	0
Farriery (nets only)	6,500	6,500	0	0
Wheelwrighting	5,440	5,440	279	553

Notes:
1. Marginal costs include salaries and other related costs of tutors.
2. Fixed costs include an apportionment of administration and other overhead costs.
3. For some disciplines the running of the courses has been contracted out and this is why there is no difference between marginal and fixed costs.
4. For open courses the costs are net and take account of fees paid by students.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the Rural Development Commission's 1993 strategy document.

Mr. Atkins: I have today arranged for copies of the Rural Development Commission's document, "Rural Development Strategy for the 1990s", published in December 1993, to be placed in the Library of each House.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date he was informed by the Rural Development Commission of the possible winding down of its direct training commitment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend has not been informed by the Rural Development Commission of a possible winding down of its direct training commitment. Department officials informed my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Sir Paul Beresford, on 14 December 1994 that the commissioners were considering various options for the future provision of the commission's direct training services which assist rural economic development.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by skill the number of craftsmen trained by Rural Development Commission staff based in Salisbury for each year since the facility was built.

Mr. Atkins: The number of craftsmen and craftswomen who have had all or some of their training provided by Rural Development Commission staff based in Salisbury is as follows:

Table 1: Number of apprentices trained

NETS	1981–82	1982–83	1983–84	1984–85	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Farriery	115	113	117	118	122	119	91	94	102	115	125	105	25
Thatching	33	34	30	25	29	16	24	24	28	21	29	22	25
Forgework	22	27	39	40	36	38	32	38	37	44	26	19	25
Saddlery	16	17	15	14	14	14	12	13	16	14	15	15	15
Furniture	16	21	28	28	35	36	32	35	49	41	26	31	24
Upholstery	4	8	11	18	12	17	18	11	13	12	7	12	24
Woodworking	12	14	27	51	54	59	50	55	64	60	53	37	36
Wheelwrighting	—	—	4	4	9	3	3	2	2	7	4	9	5
General Engineering/Fabrication	10	19	22	18	13	13	12	13	16	20	13	12	20
Agricultural Miscellaneous Repairs	12	22	27	29	18	14	17	9	5	16	—	—	—
Plastics	6	12	12	11	14	11	12	7	11	16	9	9	6
General Building	1	8	13	14	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dry Stone Walling	6	3	9	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	253	298	354	376	359	341	303	301	343	366	307	271	205

Table 2: Number of craftworkers attending open courses

Open courses	1981–82	1982–83	1983–84	1984–85	1985–86	1986–87	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Farriery	—	—	—	—	21	—	19	—	21	18	4	16	—
Thatching	—	—	—	—	37	24	75	27	30	2	2	8	—
Forgework	20	42	55	25	9	25	42	13	28	36	23	18	18
Saddlery	25	26	24	37	18	12	28	49	67	53	48	50	50
Furniture	30	35	42	38	45	99	74	61	40	37	52	53	51
Upholstery	20	30	30	25	26	28	14	21	20	25	11	16	13
Woodworking	5	7	—	23	39	21	33	45	67	30	27	24	14
Wheelwrighting	—	—	—	—	7	—	5	3	—	5	4	—	14
Welding	12	17	8	8	7	4	7	—	2	2	—	—	—
Microcomputers	—	206	210	99	22	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Plastics	12	20	8	18	16	11	27	16	10	6	8	10	15
Pottery	—	—	—	5	14	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Vehicle Electrics	12	12	12	9	19	51	11	—	31	—	—	—	—
Builders Estimating	25	92	22	30	123	157	97	183	22	—	—	—	—
Wood Turning	6	12	8	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electrical Estimating	—	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Supervisors course	—	—	—	—	—	34	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	167	499	419	325	403	470	432	418	338	214	179	195	175

CITES

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement to the House on the outcome of the Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species meeting in Florida.

Mr. Atkins *[pursuant to his reply 24 November 1994 column 241–42]:* I regret that some of the factual information given in my answer was incorrect. The first paragraph of the answer should have read as follows:

> The CITES conference of the parties agreed new measures to strengthen the operation and effectiveness of the convention. Thirty species presently included on appendix II and III will be uplisted to appendix I, and five species will be uplisted from appendix III to appendix II. Twenty-two species presently on appendix I or II will be downlisted, including six which will be deleted from the appendices altogether. The current listing of a further eight species will be unchanged, but attached conditions will be relaxed. Thirty-three species will be added to the convention for the first time.

Additionally the number of parties given in paragraph 9 of my answer should have been 124 instead of 126.

Housing (HIV)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what technical or economic reasons arose from the research commissioned from the Building Research Establishment by his Department to inform the review of part M of the building regulations on why all new housing could not be built with level thresholds as an essential element of independent living for people with HIV.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government will shortly be consulting on proposals to revise the building regulations in England and Wales to make new housing more accessible to disabled people. One of the matters to be included in that consultation is the issue of level thresholds. A report on relevant research undertaken by the Building Research Establishment will be included in the consultation package.

Rural Craftsmen

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his policy to give financial support to the training of craftsmen in traditional rural industries including farriery, saddlery and wheelwrighting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Rural Development Commission is the Government's rural regeneration agency and has statutory responsibility for keeping under review and advising my right hon. Friend upon all matters relating to the economic and social development of rural areas of England. The commission may carry out, or assist others to carry out, measures to further such development. Such measures can include the training of craftsmen in traditional rural industries where these are of importance to the rural economy. However, it is for the commission to decide the most appropriate and cost-effective means of delivering this support.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total budget of the southern regions of the National Rivers Authority for the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Atkins: I am informed by the National Rivers Authority that the total budget of its southern region for 1994–95 was £43.6 million.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Sir Paul Beresford: For my Department costs directly attributable to the change in national dialling codes amount to less than £100. There will be no on-going additional expenditure.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the reciprocal arrangements between his Department and the Italian authorities concerning RAF low flying training over Italy and Italian air force low flying over the United Kingdom specify *(a)* the maximum number of sorties and *(b)* requirements for flight authorisation.

Mr. Soames: There are no formal agreements relating to low flying training by the RAF over Italy or by the Italian air force over the United Kingdom. Requests for use of the low flying systems of Italy and the United Kingdom are considered individually by officials of the Ministry of Defence of the country in which the sorties will be flown. Such requests include details of the numbers of aircraft and the duration of deployment. Approval of such requests, if granted, would be conditional on the aircrews receiving a comprehensive face-to-face briefing on the regulations governing the use of the respective low flying system.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on conducting Royal Air Force police investigations of alleged breaches of low flying regulations which originate from sources other than witnesses on the ground.

Mr. Soames: The RAF police may be tasked to carry out an investigation in any case where it appears that a breach of low flying regulations may have occurred, regardless of the source of the complaint.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the RAF police investigations of alleged breaches of flying regulations during 1993 originated from *(a)* complaints from members of the public, *(b)* representations from hon. Members, *(c)* members of the armed forces and *(d)* other sources.

Mr. Soames: Of the 686 RAF police investigations in 1993, 39 originated from representations from hon. Members. A breakdown of investigations by the other categories listed could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the means employed to verify that non-United Kingdom based foreign aircrews conducting low-level flying training over the United Kingdom are observing low flying regulations during *(a)* the planning and *(b)* the execution of their sorties.

Mr. Soames: Foreign aircrews using the United Kingdom low flying system are subject to the same monitoring as United Kingdom crews to ensure compliance with low flying regulations.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sums were paid by the Italian authorities for use of United Kingdom range and low-flying facilities in 1993.

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's practice to release details of government-to-government payments of this kind.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 1 December, *Official Report*, column *907*, what is the current radius of the Eshott microlight avoidance area *(a)* for foreign military aircraft and *(b)* for British military aircraft; and if the operators of Eshott airfield are provided with information on the dimensions of the avoidance area;

(2) in respect of which avoidance areas the diversions applying to foreign aircraft are different from those applying to British aircraft;

(3) if the radius requirements in respect of the Eshott microlight avoidance area apply equally to all foreign aircraft.

Mr. Soames: It is my Department's policy not to release specific details of flying restrictions in individual areas, although we understand that the operators of Eshott airfield are aware of the dimensions of their avoidance. The dimensions of all avoidances apply equally to both United Kingdom and foreign military aircraft.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances other than official NATO squadron exchanges or exercises he grants permission to foreign aircrew to conduct low flying over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: Each request for foreign aircraft to fly in the United Kingdom low flying system is considered on its merits, taking into account the principle of reciprocity, the mutual benefit of such flying to the United Kingdom and our allies and the wider defence interest.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *945*, what rank of RAF officer authorised the flight by Italian air force aircraft on 14 July.

Mr. Soames: Use of the United Kingdom low flying system was authorised by my officials, and the specific sortie concerned was properly booked with the tactical booking cell at RAF West Drayton. There was no requirement for individual flight plans to be authorised by an RAF officer.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the date, number, type and nationality of aircraft involved, and source of the reported breach, for each confirmed breach of the Eshott microlight avoidance area in 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Soames: Breaches of Eshott microlight site which were confirmed by RAF police investigations are detailed:

Date	Number and type of aircraft	Nationality
1991		
25 September	4 F16s	Royal Netherlands Air Force
26 November	2 Hawks	RAF
1992		
6 May	1 Buccaneer	RAF
9 September	5 Jaguars	French Air Force
12 November	1 F15E	USAF
8 December	1 Tornado	RAF

All were reported by staff working at the site.

My answer of 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *907*, stated that eight breaches occurred in 1992. Further investigation has, however, revealed that this figure included a number of cases where a breach was suspected but could not be confirmed by RAF investigations. The correct total for 1992 is four.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-level passes were conducted over Her Majesty's prison Stocken by an RAF Tornado on 27 September; what was the minimum authorised altitude for the passes; what use was made of reheat; what attack profiles were used; what consideration was given to the environmental effects of the activity on the surrounding population; and what was the sum recovered from the Prison Service in payment for the service.

Mr. Soames: Although the precise number was not recorded, between six and eight low-level passes were made over Her Majesty's prison Stocken on 27 September 1994 at the request of Her Majesty's Prison Service. The aircraft flew at a height of 1,000 ft in a figure of eight pattern centred on the prison. The pattern was rotated to avoid the undue concentration of environmental effects. On approaching the prison complex the aircraft descended to 250 ft and only used reheat when within the prison boundary for a period of five seconds on each pass. This task was conducted at the end of a normal training flight and no payments have been sought from the Prison Service.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many low-level sorties were conducted by Royal Air Force aircraft over Italy during 1993; and at what minimum altitudes.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Low flying by Royal Air Force aircraft in Italy is in general permitted down to 500 ft, although in certain specified areas flying down to 250 ft may be authorised.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the basis of the determination, contained in his Department's evidence to the Defence Select Committee, HC 314 of Session 1993–94, page 37, that the breach of the Dounreay nuclear power station avoidance area by two Portuguese aircraft on 21 September 1993, was inadvertent; and if a copy of the RAF police report on the incident was passed to the commanding officer of the aircrew concerned.

Mr. Soames: The aircraft concerned were carrying out a training sortie which, had the planned route been followed, would have taken them no closer than 10 nautical miles to the Dounreay power station. During the sortie the aircraft became lost; to regain its bearings, it flew north to the coast and then east back on to its planned route. In doing so, it inadvertently infringed the Dounreay avoidance area.

A copy of the RAF police report was not sent to the commanding officer of the aircrew concerned as the matter had already been discussed with the senior officer of the Portuguese detachment concerned in a debrief at RAF Lossiemouth immediately after the sortie had been flown.

Simulated Attacks

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many telephone kiosks appear on the list of approved features for use as simulated targets for low-level toss or dive attack.

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are taken into consideration when reviewing the suitability of a particular feature for inclusion on the list of approved mock targets for toss or dive attack.

Mr. Soames: Features are carefully selected taking into account the location of nearby habitation, environmental and flight safety factors and their similarity to targets which might be encountered during operational sorties. Targets are surveyed by the RAF police before inclusion on the list.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the total number of simulated attack passes carried out during the recent incident involving Royal Air Force Tornados at Gollinglithfoot, Yorkshire; how many attack runs were made by each aircraft; what was the precise time of the incident; what type of exercise the planes were engaged in; and who authorised the exercise;

(2) how many of the simulated attack runs carried out by Tornados from RAF Bruggen on a telephone kiosk in Gollinglithfoot were *(a)* toss attacks, *(b)* dive attacks and *(c)* level pass attacks.

Mr. Soames: Five Tornado aircraft each flew a single reconnaissance profile, similar to a level pass attack, between 1020 and 1038 hours on 28 June; a further five Tornados each flew a single reconnaissance profile between 1520 and 1535 that day. No toss or dive attacks were made. This activity was part of an exercise intended to evaluate the performance of squadron aircrew which was authorised by the Officer Commanding No. 31 Squadron RAF Bruggen.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the particular aspects of toss and dive attacks which limit them to specifically authorised features; and to what extent similar considerations are applied to level pass attacks.

Mr. Soames: To enhance deconfliction during toss and dive attacks, targets are allocated from an approved list to a single aircraft at a time. A level pass attack does not differ significantly from normal low-level flight, and no additional deconfliction arrangements are necessary.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions to Royal Air Force aircrew concerning the desirability of selecting *(a)* features in

villages and *(b)* buildings likely to be inhabited, as mock targets, were in force at the time of the incident at Gollinglithfoot, Yorkshire; and what changes have been made to these instructions since the incident.

Mr. Soames: Aircrews are instructed that when choosing any type of simulated target, they and authorising officers are to satisfy themselves that the briefed flight profile can be completed safely without infringing low flying regulations or airspace restrictions. Targets are to be selected with consideration for nearby habitation. Repetitive overflight of targets is prohibited unless essential to achieve training objectives, but no single location is to be overflown more than twice per aircraft during each sortie. These instructions were in force on 28 June when the activity occurred at Gollinglithfoot. No subsequent changes have been made.

Captain Chris Kelly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the death of Captain Chris Kelly.

Mr. Soames: It would not be appropriate to make such a statement while the inquest into the death of Captain Kelly is pending.

RAF Aircrew

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what qualifying criteria are required to be met by Royal Air Force aircrew before they are permitted to participate in *(a)* a tactical leadership training course and *(b)* a NATO tactical leadership programme course; what targets are set for the frequency of RAF combat-ready aircrew participation in such courses; and how many such courses have been held in each year since 1991.

Mr. Soames: The qualifying criteria for all aircrew participating in tactical leadership training is that they be at least combat ready. Combat-ready aircrew take part in a TLT once during their early career, although they may return later in a supervisory capacity. One TLT was carried out in 1991, and two courses have been held in each year since.

The pre-course standard for all aircrew participating in the tactical leadership programme is as follows: 500 hours operation flying with 100 hours on aircraft type, with pilots qualified to lead a formation of two aircraft. In addition, half the pilots in any unit detachment to TLP must be qualified to lead a formation of four aircraft or more. No targets are set for the frequency of RAF aircrew participation in TLP. Six TLP courses have been held each year since 1991, and a further out-of-area course was held in 1993 and 1994.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the private sector to develop civil aviation at Royal Air Force Finningley; what replies he has received to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department has made no representations to the private sector to develop civil aviation at Royal Air Force Finningley. We are, however, considering proposals put forward by the hon. Member.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the name and rank of Treasury officials participating in the defence costs study working group on Royal Air Force, Finningley; and what were the number of visits paid and formal meetings held by these teams.

Mr. Soames: There has never been a defence costs study working group on Royal Air Force Finningley. As part of a wider remit, however, one of the defence costs study teams examined flying training in all three services, including that conducted at RAF Finningley. The Treasury representative on the team was Mr. R. Devereux, a grade 5 official. There is no central record of all the visits paid and meetings held by the defence costs study teams and such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Air Force Bases (Security)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last inspection was made at *(a)* Royal Air Force Finningley and *(b)* Royal Air Force Macrahanish under the terms of the intermediate nuclear forces treaty; when the last arrest was made at each base under the base by-laws; and how many breaches of security there have been at each base over the last 18 months.

Mr. Soames: There have been no inspections under the terms of the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty at RAF Finningley and RAF Macrihanish; neither are declared INF inspection sites. There are no byelaws enacted under the Military Lands Acts at RAF Finningley and RAF Macrihanish; there have therefore been no arrests under any such byelaws. There have been no known unauthorised incursions at RAF Finningley and RAF Macrihanish during the past 18 months.

Air Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the dates, aircraft types involved, locations and risk categories of air misses numbers *(a)* 39/93, *(b)* 52/93, *(c)* 56/93, *(d)* 66/93, *(e)* 73/93, *(f)* 82/93, *(g)* 92/93 and *(h)* 113/93.

Mr. Soames: There are no air misses with the serial numbers referred to in the question. Air miss serial numbers are not necessarily continuous since an air miss report can subsequently be withdrawn. The decision to file an air miss report rests with the commander of any of the aircraft involved. There are occasionally instances when an air miss report is later withdrawn by the filing pilot when he realises that there had in fact been no risk of collision.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what hazardous waste stored at *(a)* Royal Air Force Finningley and *(b)* Royal Air Force Macrihanish is from United States bases in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) abroad; and if there are polychlorine benzines stored at the bases.

Mr. Soames: No hazardous waste originating from United States bases in the United Kingdom or abroad is stored at RAF Finningley or RAF Macrihanish. A small number of electronic components of United Kingdom origin in equipment stored at RAF Finningley contain very small amounts of polychlorinated biphenyl. None is stored at RAF Macrihanish.

Major Graham Carruthers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons Major Graham Carruthers was given immunity in respect of the recent court martial of Major Peter Kennedy earlier in December.

Mr. Soames: Any witness giving evidence in civil or criminal proceedings in the United Kingdom is entitled to refuse to answer any question if the answer to the question might incriminate him or her and might be used in criminal proceedings against him or her. In this case, an allegation of a technical assault on Major Kennedy by Major Carruthers could have been made. To avoid any suggestion at the trial of Major Kennedy that Major Carruthers might therefore be inhibited from giving evidence on the grounds that he might incriminate himself, the normal practice was adopted of his commanding officer condoning that allegation.

"Competing for Quality"

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by individual activity those who have been awarded contracts under the "Competing for Quality" programme for the periods *(a)* 1 April 1992 to 30 September 1993 and *(b)* 1 October 1993 to the latest available date.

Mr. Freeman: In the period from April 1992 to September 1994 the Ministry of Defence examined 82 support activities under its "Competing for Quality" programme, and as a result contracts were placed with the private sector in respect of 46 of those activities; I have written to the hon. Member with a list and have placed a copy of the letter in the Library of the House. Details of individual contracts remain commercial-in-confidence, although information on contracts awarded is published monthly in the efficiency unit's market testing bulletin, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether German manufactured anti-personnel mines have been transferred or re-exported to UNITA forces in Angola in the last decade

Mr. Freeman: We have no information to indicate that UNITA has acquired any German-manufactured anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the possibility of modifying the German AT2 anti-tank mine so as to deploy it as a de facto and anti-personnel mine.

Mr. Freeman: Such a modification is not considered practical, and no formal assessment has been made of the possibility.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many German AT2 anti-tank mines are in use with the United Kingdom armed forces; and in what role.

Mr. Freeman: There are no German AT2 anti-tank mines currently in service with United Kingdom forces although they are being supplied as part of the multiple-launch rocket system, phase II. It is our established policy for security reasons not to reveal quantities of munitions held. The role of the system is the rapid deployment of minefields.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mines are currently available for deployment with *(a)* multiple-launch rocket systems and *(b)* the Skorpion mine-laying system.

Mr. Freeman: Although the multiple-launch rocket system phase II, which incorporates anti-tank mines, is in production, none is currently in service. It is our established policy, for security reasons, not to reveal quantities of munitions held.

The Skorpion mine-laying system is not currently in service with United Kingdom forces.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the United Kingdom has exported or transferred to any other country German manufactured anti-personnel mines in the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the effect of the non-proliferation treaty in the design and maintenance of United Kingdom triggers for its nuclear weapons at the United States nuclear weapons laboratory at Sandia;

(2) what assessment he has made of the effect of the non-proliferation treaty on the transfer under the 1958 United Kingdom, United States of America agreement on nuclear weapons or fissile material between the two countries; and what implications exist for the renewal of the treaty.

Mr. Freeman: The non-proliferation treaty has no implications for the transfer of materials and equipment between the United Kingdom and the United States under the terms of the 1958 mutual defence agreement.

Recruitment

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the spending on services recruitment for the last year for which figures are available; and what are his estimates for spending during the current year.

Mr. Soames: Expenditure on recruitment to the armed forces during financial year 1993–94, the most recent year for which figures are available, was £96,573,000. This figure differs from that given by my predecessor the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 20 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *604*. This was as a result of a number of bills which were paid later than had been previously expected. It is estimated that expenditure on recruitment during the current financial year will be £92,340,000.

Royal Artillery Range, Benbecula

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the proposed schedule for contractorisation at the Royal Artillery range, Benbecula; and if he will give an assurance that Ministry of Defence personnel will be kept in place until civilian employees are ready to take on their duties.

Mr. Freeman: Consideration is currently being given to the most cost-effective means of operating the Royal Artillery range, Hebrides.

No firm proposals have yet been made and the existing contract is scheduled to be relet at the end of 1995.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Freeman: The office of the Secretary of State for Defence is able to receive and send electronic mail to some 6,500 users internally. This should rise to 9,000 users by the end of 1995 and 12,000 users by the end of 1996.

Tanks

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the values and volumes of material exported under the two memoranda of understanding specific to tanks signed with Jordan on 28 November 1979 and 2 February 1989.

Mr. Freeman: It has been the practice of successive administrations not to reveal information relating to specific defence exports.

Defence Export Sales Organisation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a table of the total value of defence exports exported through the Defence Export Sales Organisation in each year since 1981.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is contained in table 2, vote 3, class I, supply estimates. The most recent edition is for 1994–95—HC276-I, and copies of this are available from the Library of the House.

Chile

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department, its officials, or any person acting on their behalf have been involved in negotiations jointly with United Kingdom enterprises and enterprises in Chile in the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: Officials from the Defence Export Services Organisation within my Department have supported efforts by various UK companies to form relationships with Chilean enterprises. However, negotiations between United Kingdom and foreign enterprises are a commercial matter in which the MOD does not participate.

Al-Yamamah Contracts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence through what agents the oil made available to him as part of the Al-Yamamah contracts was placed on the commodity markets; and what have been the transaction costs involved.

Mr. Freeman: Details of the funding arrangements for Al-Yamamah are a matter for the Saudi Arabian Government. It is not our practice to comment on detailed matters concerning individual defence exports sales.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it was the practice to ask for end user certificates for defence exports supplied to Saudi Arabia under the Al-Yamamah contracts.

Mr. Freeman: Under the Al-Yamamah programme, equipment is supplied by the United Kingdom Government which has incorporated no-transfer provisions in the government-to-government memorandum of understanding covering the programme.

Equipment (contracts)

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *809*, for what military purpose the 12 light dumpers referred to are required; what factors led him to conclude that leasing was not appropriate in this instance; what information he has on availability on the civilian market of equivalent vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The 12 light dumpers are to be held available for short notice, air portable deployments. Given this requirement a short-term lease arrangement would not meet the time required to prepare commercial machines to meet the military specification, while a long-term leasing arrangement would not be cost effective in view of the need to ensure short notice priority for military requirements. A/S Hydrema is the only manufacturer, with the necessary quality assurance certification, who can supply light dumpers of the size required by MOD.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Freeman: The reprogramming of all the Ministry of Defence telephone exchanges and call connect systems in order to access the new Oftel national dial codes was completed in August 1994 and both the new and old codes now operate in parallel. Call information record and management systems have also been reprogrammed, together with the MOD's call barring and routing tables. Stock orders for all new letterheaded stationary, business cards, and so on, ordered after 1 August 1994 have the respective new dial codes shown.

An estimate of the cost for these number changes across the Ministry of Defence, is £15,000.

Defence Research Agency, West Freugh

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what radar bomb scoring facilities are currently available at the Defence Research Agency establishment at West Freugh.

Mr. Freeman: The test and evaluation establishment at West Freugh is not part, at present, of the Defence Research Agency. It is capable of providing the necessary facilities for radar bomb scoring and has the required radars and instrumentation for such activity.

Maritime Patrol Aircraft

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about his plans for replacing the current maritime patrol aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence has invited four potential prime contractors to bid for the supply of a maritime patrol aircraft to replace the Nimrod early next century. The four contractors are British Aerospace, Dassault, Lockheed and Loral ASIC. I expect a contract

to be let with the winner of this international competition in the late summer of 1996.

Defence Fixed Telecommunication Service

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department is now in a position to issue a cardinal point specification in relation to the defence fixed telecommunication service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* My Department plans to issue a cardinal point specification early this year.

HEALTH

Nurse Statistics

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified nursing staff there have been by specialty, for each region, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 January 1994, *Official Report,* column *238* for the years 1989 to 1992. Information for 1993 will be placed in the Library.

GP Fundholding

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent evaluations into *(a)* the cost-effectiveness, *(b)* the impact on equity of treatment and *(c)* the effect on bureaucracy of fundholding have been commissioned; and which of them have been published.

Mr. Malone: We welcome the recent independent evaluations of the benefits of general practitioner fundholding. These include: "Evaluating the NHS Reforms", Kings Fund Institute 1994; "Implementing GP Fundholding", Howard Glennester et al. 1994; and the "OECD Economic Survey 1993–94: United Kingdom". On 20 December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a review of bureaucracy in general practice.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information she has about the number of hours general practitioners spent on paperwork in March 1991 and currently;

(2) what information she has about differences in time spent on paperwork between general practitioners in fundholding and in non-fundholding practices.

Mr. Malone: Information in the form requested is not available.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 1 December, *Official Report,* column *832,* if she will make a statement regarding her Department's expenditure on special advisers in each of the last three financial years and for the financial year 1979–80.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave on 19 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *937.*

Alcoholism

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for the co-ordination of alcohol services and other functions carried out by regional alcohol co-ordination following the intended demise of the regional health authorities; and what is to become of the funds made available to regional health authority's following circular HN(89)4 to provide for regional alcohol co-ordinators.

Mr. Bowis: The report, "Public Health in England: Roles and Responsibilities of the Department of Health and the NHS", copies of which are available in the Library, makes it clear that health authorities will be expected to continue alcohol-related work. There will be a gradual process of devolution of specialist advice from regional offices as the recommendations of the functions and manpower review take effect and it will be for health authorities to decide the form this should take. Regional offices will be responsible for ensuring that robust and appropriate arrangements are in place. Finance for alcohol co-ordination work was made available to regional health authorities in 1989–90 and added into their general funding in 1990–91.

Health Authority Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed by each health region in 1993–94; and how many were administrative.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table. At 30 September 1993, administrative and clerical staff made up 17.3 per cent. of the total national health service work force in England. Over a quarter of administrative staff work in direct support of clinicians, allowing them to concentrate their skills and experience on direct patient care.

Total national health service staff and administrative staff employed in each region as at 30 September 1993

Whole-time equivalents

	Administration and clerical	*Total*
Northern	7,030	48,560
Yorkshire	9,140	57,810
Trent	10,980	73,790
East Anglia	4,660	31,050
NW Thames	8,590	44,900
NE Thames	10,420	60,060
SE Thames	9,760	53,410
SW Thames	7,070	42,440
Wessex	6,800	45,540
Oxford	6,040	34,810
South Western	7,880	52,010
West Midlands	13,020	81,720
Mersey	5,970	37,350
North Western	11,060	68,680
SHA's and Others	14,230	34,570
England Total	132,650	766,710

Source:
Department of Health Medical and Non-Medical Workforce Censuses.
Note:
All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.

Family Health Services

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the level of spending per head of population on family health service services in England; and if her answer of 1 December, *Official Report*, column *830*, included such expenditure.

Mr. Malone: Gross expenditure on family health services per head of population in England in 1993–94 was £157.

The reply that I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 26 May 1994 at column *305* gave per head of population spending figures for each family health services authority in England for 1992–93.

The information is not directly comparable because the figures relate to different years, and the earlier answer recorded expenditure by FHSAs on an accruals basis whereas the national figure of £157 specifically reflects spending in cash terms on family health services. Key differences are that the FHSA data include GP fundholders' purchases of hospital services and FHSA administration costs, and exclude dental services administered centrally by the dental practices board and the income from prescription and dental charges collected by FHS contractors.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase funding for research into sudden infant death syndrome.

Mr. Sackville: The main agency for Government funding of research into sudden infant death syndrome and respiratory distress syndrome is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Between 1991–92 and 1992–93, the last two years for which figures are available, spending on this area of research rose by almost 117 per cent., from £747,000 to £1.62 million.

The Department is currently funding two research projects through its central research programme which are both examining changes in infant care practice following the "Back to Sleep" campaign. Estimated expenditure on these totals £408,257 between 1993 and 1996.

In 1995, the Department will be continuing with a further £200,000 special in-depth study using the mechanism of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy to examine possible new, avoidable factors leading to sudden and unexplained deaths in infancy. This is in addition to £200,000 which has been spent on the project already this year.

The need for further research into sudden infant death syndrome is kept under regular review. New research is commissioned as soon as the need arises, as exemplified by the chief medical officer's recent announcement of the formation of an expert group to steer further work on cot death and to examine the likelihood of a causal link between chemicals and cot death.

Maternity Contracts

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements she has made for piloting the maternity contract minimum data set; and if she will list the sites where it will be piloted, who will be responsible, the duration and costs of the piloting exercise and when a report of the piloting is expected to be available.

Mr. Sackville: No arrangements are in place for piloting the maternity contract minimum data set. These will be made following consultation on the content of the proposed data set.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions her Department has had with the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Paediatric Association about the content of the maternity contract minimum data set; and when she proposes to place a copy of the consultation document in the Library.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health consulted widely on the content of the maternity, community and mental health contract minimum data set during 1993, and held meetings to gain the views of representatives of the healthcare professional bodies.

The outcome of the consultations is included in five documents which will be placed in the Library:— "CMDS Volume 1 Overview"; "CMDS Volume 2 Community Health Services"; "CMDS Volume 3 Maternity Services"; "CMDS Volume 4 Mental Health Services" and "CMDS Volume 5 Data Models".

Subsequent work during 1994 concentrated on the community contract minimum data set. As work on the maternity contract minimum data set has resumed, further discussions will be held with the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Paediatric Association.

Breast Screening

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons no information was available for the former North West Thames region in the tables of data from the maternity hospital episode system for 1991–92 which she placed in the Library following her answer of 27 October, *Official Report*, column *820*.

Mr. Sackville: During 1991–92, changes were undertaken to the hospital information systems in North West Thames region. Problems were encountered in re-establishing links to collate some centrally required maternity data, and the region was unable to provide full data. These difficulties have been resolved and maternity information for the former North West Thames region is available for subsequent years.

Recycled Paper

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that all Government Departments NHS and NHS trust authorities and other non-departmental public bodies should publish all reports on recycled paper.

Mr. Sackville: Departments are encouraged to purchase paper and board containing as much recycled fibre as possible without impairing performance. National health service and NHS trust authorities, along with other non-departmental public bodies, make their own purchasing decisions, but we would expect them to consider the environmental issue.

Road Accident Victims

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what statutory authority hospitals may request payment for treatment from road accident victims; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Hospitals are empowered to collect an emergency treatment fee of £20.65 under section 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. The fee must be covered by motor vehicle insurance policies and is payable by vehicle users in respect of each person given immediate treatment or examination arising from a road traffic accident.

Charges may also be made, under section 157, for subsequent in-patient or out-patient hospital treatment, up to ceilings of £2,856 and £286 respectively. These charges are levied directly on insurance companies, but only in cases where companies make third party payments.

Diabetes

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's current policy on the provision of supplies for the treatment of diabetes.

Mr. Sackville: Human and animal insulin and disposable syringes to dispense it are available on prescription where necessary for the treatment of diabetes.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if novo pen *(a)* cartridges and *(b)* needles used by diabetics are available on prescription.

Mr. Malone: The cartridges of insulin for the novo pen II injection device are available on national health service prescription; the needles that fit them are not.

Disabled Children

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many families with children with disabilities have been provided with respite care for each year since 1990; and what proportion has been provided to them in their own homes.

Mr. Bowis: The available information, which relates only to children accommodated by local authorities under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, is shown in the table. This does not include families whose children are not accommodated by local authorities, but may receive respite care under section 17 of the Act within their own homes or elsewhere.

Children accommodated by local authorities under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 because parents need relief from problems or stresses of caring for children with disabilities, England.

	Period[1] ending 31 March	
	1992	*1993*
Series of short term placements covered by one agreement[2]	1,600	3,600
Single placement[2,3]	900	1,400

[1] Periods 14 October 1991 to 31 March 1992 and 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993. No comparable information is available prior to implementation of the Act on 14 October 1991.
[2] Some children may be counted in both categories if their type of care changed during the period.
[3] Most children in single placements were receiving long term care.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department has taken since the publication of the Children Act report 1993 and the social services inspectorate report on the national inspection of services to disabled children and their families in 1994 to improve implementation of the Children Act 1989 with respect to these children and their families.

Mr. Bowis: Following the publication of "Services to Disabled Children and their Families" and other information about the implementation of the family support provisions of the Children Act the SSI organised six workshops across England to disseminate the findings and discuss with local authorities how improvements can be achieved.

Ninety two local authorities attended the workshops, and there was widespread commitment to seeking ways to improve services. A report of the workshop discussions is being prepared.

Our continuing interest in services for disabled children and their families is demonstrated by the inclusion of a further inspection in the SSI work programme for 1995–96. The findings will be published in due course.

NHS Guidelines

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she has issued guidance giving further clarification on the issues of *(a)* setting eligibility criteria, *(b)* assessment of patients and *(c)* service provisions;

(2) if her Department has issued guidance on the NHS responsibility for meeting long-term health care needs following the consultation exercise carried out over the summer.

Mr. Bowis: We are considering the results of the consultation exercise. A final version of the guidance will be issued in due course.

Health Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cash allocation for health authorities' discretionary use in each year since 1988–89 and in 1994–95; and what was the percentage change in each year.

Mr. Sackville: The allocations for resident population for hospital and community health services for 1991–92 to 1994–95, including capital charges, are shown in the table. Figures for earlier years are not available on a comparable basis.

Year	*Allocation for resident population*	*per cent. change*
1991–92	£17,283,812,000	
1992–93	£18,909,977,000	9.41
1993–94	£19,731,477,000	4.34
1994–95	£20,569,646,000	4.25

Medicines

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that the system of regulation imposed by the Medicines Act 1968 will be maintained to ensure that medicines are not marketed without a product licence.

Mr. Sackville: From 12 January this year, no medicinal product for human use, unless specifically exempt from

licensing, may be placed on the market in the United Kingdom except in accordance with a licence issued by the United Kingdom Licensing Authority under the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulations 1994 or the Medicines Act 1968, or, in a small number of cases, an authorisation issued by the European Commission.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department has completed work on the pilot questionnaire to produce regular statistics on the Children Act 1989; and in what areas information will be collected.

Mr. Bowis: No general questionnaire is planned as regular statistics are already collected and published to monitor local authority implementation of many of the key aspects of the Act. The most recent figures were presented to Parliament in the Children Act report 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

Information is not regularly collected centrally at present on local authority support for children and families under section 17 of the Act. A questionnaire was sent to local authorities in September 1994 to identify the information they collect for their own use in implementing this section of the Act. Response to this questionnaire is not yet complete.

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding her Department has made available to local authorities to assist with the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Bowis: In general, central Government support to local authorities is not allocated to individual services; it is for local authorities to decide on the allocation of resources between particular services in the light of local needs and priorities. Implementation of the Children Act 1989 was, however, one of the factors which influenced the relevant revenue support grant settlements. Standard spending for children's services in the current year is 17 per cent. in real terms above 1990–91.

Leather Preservatives

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will commission research into the carcinogenic properties of leather preservatives; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We are not aware of any particular concern regarding the carcinogenic potential of leather preservatives, and have no plans for commissioning work in this area.

The International Agency for Research into Cancer reviewed the data in leather tanning and processing industries, and in the manufacture of leather goods, in 1987 and concluded that there is no evidence to warrant classification of these processes in causing cancer.

Creuzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Creuzfeldt-Jakob disease were diagnosed in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990; and if she will break down cases by occupation.

Mr. Sackville: There have been 166 definite and probable cases of Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease since 1990. Details are shown in the table.

Year	*Total*
1990	31
1991	36
1992	51
1993	40
1994 (to April)	8
Total for the period	166

A breakdown of these cases by occupation is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A demonstration of the broad range of lifetime occupations of 50 definite and probable cases is at table 7 of the third annual report of the Creutzfeldt–Jakob Surveillance Unit. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

AIDS

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been made available for the treatment of AIDS in 1993–94 and 1994–95 in *(a)* absolute terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the NHS budget.

Mr. Sackville: The amount of funding made available specifically for the treatment of HIV and AIDS services was £148 million in 1993–94 and £164 million in 1994–95. As a percentage of the total NHS budget, we estimate this to be approximately 0.5 per cent. in each year.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Sackville: Electronic mail is used throughout the Department of Health and its agencies. However, there are no immediate plans for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to receive or respond to external communications by electronic mail.

The Department of Health is consulting widely to determine how best to develop electronic mail links with other Government Departments, organisations and electronic networks. These discussions are part of a wider study on external communications.

The Department will consider establishing electronic mail links with external contacts only when it is sure that it can receive and respond to electronic mail communications effectively without risking the security of confidential or personal information.

Hospitals, Manchester

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the version of the Wythenshawe hospital development scheme and the clinical review of hospital services in south Manchester since her answer of 21 June, *Official Report*, column *119*; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Professor Sir Herbert Duthie's review of clinical services in south Manchester was received by North West regional health authority at its meeting in November 1994. The review broadly endorsed the proposals for Wythenshawe hospital. Manchester district health authority has been asked to draw up a new public consultation document outlining those needs of the local population that can be met on the site of Withington hospital. Consultation is planned to begin in February.

The RHA has set up a steering group to ensure that there are no further unnecessary delays in developing services in south Manchester. In the meantime, the South Manchester university hospital national health service trust continues to develop its plans for major capital investment at Wythenshawe hospital.

Doctor's Letters

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners make a charge for doctor's letters required to assist a patient's application for social housing; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: General practitioners provide a range of services outside the national health service which are considered as private matters between patient and doctor. Such services, of which no record is held, include the writing of letters to provide medical information to a third party, such as a local authority housing department. Doctors are free to charge for such services, as they wish.

Tobacco

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the status of the proposed voluntary agreement on tobacco promotion between herself and the industry; and when she expects the agreement to be concluded.

Mr. Sackville: The new voluntary agreement on tobacco products advertising and promotion was published on 21 December, copies of which are available in the Library.

Heart Disease

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of research at Harvard medical school on the practice of hydrogenating vegetable oils to produce solid fats and the effect on coronary heart disease.

Mr. Sackville: The committee on medical aspects of food policy has considered the issue of hydrogenation and has examined a wide range of research evidence, including that of Harvard medical school, for its report "Nutritional Aspects of Cardiovascular Disease", copies of which will be placed in the Library. COMA has recommended that the intake of transfatty acids in the population should not increase beyond the current average and that consideration should be given to ways of decreasing the amount present in the diet.

Smoking

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the proportion of smokers among lone mothers on income support.

Mr. Sackville: Data on the proportion of smokers amongst lone mothers on income support are not available centrally. Surveys indicate that the levels of smoking amongst lone parents and amongst low-income families are significantly higher than in the population as a whole.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her estimate of the proportion of smokers among doctors.

Mr. Sackville: The available information from a 1989 survey by the Commission of the European Communities showed that 10 per cent., of general medical practitioners in the United Kingdom were smokers. There is no information collected concerning the smoking habits of doctors working in other fields.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by her Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost her Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Sackville: The Department will not incur additional costs as a result of changes to national telephone dialling codes. Changes to the Department's telephone exchanges will be done as part of our standing maintenance arrangements and the printing of stationery with the new codes will be contained within our existing financial allocations.

Health Authorities

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the total budget for Hampshire family health services authority in the financial year 1994–95;

(2) what was the total annual budget of *(a)* Winchester, *(b)* Basingstoke and north Hampshire and *(c)* Portsmouth and south-east Hampshire district health authorities in the financial year 1994–95.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the South and West regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Rennie Fritchie, for details.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total annual budget for the Wessex regional health authority for 1994–95.

Mr. Sackville: The initial cash limit for hospital and community health services for Wessex regional health authority for 1994–95 was set at £1,345,359,000 in December 1993. This figure does not include demand-led spending on family health services or money allocated since then. Wessex regional health authority ceased to exist on 1 April 1994 when it was replaced by the new South and West regional health authority.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make available a screening programme for athletes, sports people and young people in order to reduce hypertrophic cardiomyopathy deaths.

Mr. Sackville: A genetic screening test is currently being investigated. An effective screening programme would probably need to be focused on affected families since the disease is inherited.

Stomach Ulcers

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure by the national health service in each of the last five years for which figures are available on *(a)* Zantac, *(b)* Cimetidine and *(c)* Tagamet.

Mr. Sackville: The data for Zantac and Tagamet are commercially confidential. Information in respect of Cimetidine is shown in the table.

Prescribing information for the chemical entity cimetidine

	1991	1992	1993
Prescriptions (thousands)	2,617.4	2,635.4	2,608.9
Net Ingredient Cost (£ thousands)	48,333.9	45,860.7	33,816.0

Figures are based on items and cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and also include prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for health (1) in what percentage of cases of stomach ulcers *(a)* Zantac, *(b)* Cimetidine, *(c)* Tagamet or *(d)* other acid blockers are prescribed;

(2) what information she has concerning the percentage of cases of stomach cancer in which *(a)* Zantac, *(b)* Cimetidine, *(c)* Tagamet or *(d)* other acid blockers are prescribed.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning the comparative typical costs of a full course of treatment for stomach ulcers involving *(a)* antibiotics for helicobacter whether or not in conjunction with acid blockers and *(b)* a course of acid blockers not in association with antibiotics for helicobacter; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The medicines resource centre has published data on comparative costs on the treatment of duodenal ulcers, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration she has given to the implementation of a screening programme involving a short course of antibiotics for helicobacter as a means of substantially reducing the incidence of *(a)* stomach ulcers and *(b)* stomach cancer; how the costs of such a programme might compare to a typical course of treatment involving acid blockers over a period of several years and surgery to remove all or part of the stomach; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Whether to carry out a test for, and subsequently treat, helicobacter pylori infection is primarily a clinical decision to be made by the doctor concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Zantac, Cimetidine and Tagamet are branded or generic products; by whom they are manufactured; whether the antibiotics used for the treatment of helicobacter stomach infections are branded or generic products; and what would be the effect upon the national health service drugs budget of a substantial switch from treatment by the former to the latter.

Mr. Sackville: Zantac is the brand name used by Glaxo for drug preparations of the chemical ranitidine hydrochloride. Tagamet is the brand name used by SmithKline Beecham for cimetidine preparations. Cimetidine is also available in other branded and generic versions. All the antibiotics commonly used in the eradication of helicobacter pylori are available as generic versions, except Clarithromycin, which is available only in the proprietary form. It is not possible to calculate the effects on the national health service drugs bill of a switch from H2-antagonists to antibiotic drugs for the treatment of ulcers as not all prescribing of acid suppressants is for the treatment of ulcers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information her Department holds relating to the incidence of helicobacter or similar infections in patients suffering from heart disease; what research it is funding in this area; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has no information at present. However, we are aware that research into this subject is taking place.

The Department of Health has not funded any research into this subject. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State of Health what *(a)* research projects, *(b)* publications and *(c)* meetings, conferences or seminars her Department has funded to promote a greater awareness of the benefits deriving from antibiotic treatment of helicobacter stomach infections in cases of stomach ulcers compared to treatment by a protracted course of acid blockers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The medicines resource centre, which is funded by the Department, has made available to all general practitioners and family health services authorities prescribing advisers detailed information on the success rates achievable with the various regimes, their relative costs versus maintenance therapy and the appropriate selection of patients for this intervention. The medical advisers support centre, which also is departmentally funded, has recently promoted a series of local workshops and educational meetings for FHSA prescribing advisers on this subject and more are planned for 1995–96. The MASC is also co-operating in a practice-based GP endoscopy research project which aims to speed up the rate at which patients are given a specific diagnosis and appropriate treatment, including eradication therapy. The drug and therapeutics bulletin, published by the Consumers Association and distributed to all GPs at the Department's expense, covered this topic in its February 1993 edition. Copies of the relevant D and TB and MeReC publications have been placed in the Library.

Further research into the most efficacious and economic treatment regimes should commence later this year as part of the national health service health technology assessment research and development programme.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when her Department first became aware of the developments in the treatment of stomach ulcers associated with the use of antibiotics whether or not in conjunction with acid blockers in preference to the use of such acid blockers alone; when her Department first took steps to ensure that these developments were drawn to the attention of general practitioners; how she accounts for the period between the two dates; how many operations were performed during that period for the removal of all or part of a stomach as a result of stomach ulcers; and what claims for compensation her Department is either facing or accepting.

Mr. Sackville: The use of antibiotics in the treatment of peptic ulcers has been reported and discussed in academic and professional journals for over a decade. Eradication therapy continues to be debated and medical

opinion is still divided. These are matters for the profession and the royal colleges, in particular, to lead and inform clinical opinion. Information on the number of gastrectomy and partial gastrectomy operations performed where a gastric ulcer was diagnosed is shown in the table. We are not aware of any claims for compensation against the Department.

Number of gastrectomy and partial gastrectomy operations performed where a gastric ulcer was diagnosed: finished consultant episodes

	Number
1989–90	749
1990–91	753
1991–92	556
1992–93	504

Source:
Hospital Episodes System, Department of Health.

The above figures are 100 per cent. estimates from a 25 per cent. sample database. A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of health care under one consultant in one health care provider.

Generic Products

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is provided by her Department to enable the development of new regimes of medical treatment in situations where the medication involved in the new regime would be a low-cost generic product, compared with an existing regime of treatment by a highly profitable branded product; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The choice of medical treatment is a matter for the professional judgment of the doctor concerned and will be determined primarily by the clinical needs of the particular patient. Only if there is a choice between two or more equally appropriate and effective medications would the doctor be expected to exercise a decision based on cost. General practitioners are kept informed of developments in treatment regimes, and comparative costs of treatment, by the British National Formulary, medicines resource centre bulletins and the drugs and therapeutic bulletin, all of which are supported financially by the Department of Health. All GPs are also routinely provided with an analysis of their own prescribing patterns and costs by the prescription pricing authority using prescribing analysis and cost data.

Stomach Cancer

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information she has concerning the percentage of cases in which an individual has been identified as being of greater than average risk of developing stomach cancer and in which antibiotics for helicobacter are prescribed; if it is her policy to encourage general practitioners to make greater use of such antibiotics in such cases; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what information she has concerning the percentage of cases of stomach ulcers in which antibiotics for helicobacter are prescribed; whether it is her policy to encourage general practitioners to make greater use of such antibiotics whether or not in conjunction with acid blockers in preference to the use of such acid blockers alone; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Such information is not available centrally. All general practitioners are encouraged to prescribe in a clinically effective and cost-effective manner. The decision on which drug, if any, to prescribe for a particular patient is, however, solely a matter for the clinical judgment of the doctor.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when her Department first became aware of the developments in the treatment of those at greater than average risk of stomach cancer associated with the use of antibiotics for helicobacter; when her Department first took steps to ensure that these developments were drawn to the attention of general practitioners; and how she accounts for the period between the two dates.

Mr. Sackville: Suggestions of a possible link between stomach cancer and infection with helicobacter pylori emerged around 1990. Research is still in its early stages. Dissemination of the results of such work when completed will initially be by publication in academic and professional medical journals.

Camden and Islington Health Authority

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings have been held by Ministers or officials of her Department with Camden and Islington health authority concerning the resources available for health care in Camden and Islington; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: There have been no such meetings. The allocation of resources to this health authority is the responsibility of North Thames regional health authority.

Health Education Authority

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will outline the new funding mechanism for the Health Education Authority;

(2) what plans she has to put out to tender in the private sector the work now being carried out by the Health Education Authority;

(3) what was the budget for the Health Education Authority for each of the last four years; what will be the level of funding for 1995–96; and what estimate her Department has made of the core funding for the Health Education Authority in 1996–97;

(4) what assessment she has made of the number of job losses that may result from the Government's announcement on the Health Education Authority's future.

Mr. Malone: Total funding to the Health Education Authority in the last four years has been as follows:

	£
1991–92	31,427,000
1992–93	33,955,000
1993–94	36,194,000
1994–95 (to date)	36,984,000

In 1995–96, the authority will receive direct from the Department a sum similar to that for 1994–95. Thereafter, the authority's income will be derived from departmental contracts for services it wishes the authority to provide.

The staffing of the authority will be for the authority to determine in the light of contracts awarded. Both the

Department and the authority believe that the authority is well placed to maintain, if not increase, its current income, by better marketing of its products and an increased ability to respond to the needs of its customers.

Breast Implants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ask general practioners and health service trusts to contact women who have had breast implants to inform them of the extension of the deadline to register potential claims arising from breast implants with the United States legal authorities; and if her Department will take steps to advertise the new deadline.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health is investigating reports that the deadline has been extended to 1 March 1995. When confirmation is received the Department will consider whether any further publicity is needed in addition to that provided from the United States.

Lynfield Mount Special Care Unit

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has received the report and recommendations of the external review team who inquired into the escape by Mr. Raymond Pemberton from Lynfield Mount special care unit in Bradford last June; if she will place a copy of the report in the Library; if she will arrange for a copy of the report to be provided to those individuals and organisations who gave oral and written evidence to the inquiry; and if she will make a statement outlining what action she is taking in the light of recommendations of the external review team.

Mr. Bowis: Ministers have received a copy of the external review team's recommendations which are a matter for Bradford Community Health national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact the trust for details of the action it plans to take.

Imported Blood Samples

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what quantities of amniotic fluid blood samples and human tissues were imported from Hong Kong through Heathrow airport to private laboratories in the United Kingdom in 1994; what tests are carried out on such samples for the AIDS virus, hepatitis and other infectious diseases; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available centrally on the quantity of blood and tissue samples sent to the United Kingdom from abroad. The transport of potentially infectious pathology samples is subject to detailed national and international guidelines directed at ensuring safety. Laboratories receiving such material will be aware of the procedures which they, and the sender, should follow.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the report of the review of the London ambulance service carried out by Mr. William Wells; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today received this report, copies of which are available in the Library. I am grateful to Mr. Wells and his colleagues for undertaking this review and for producing speedily such a thorough report.

The review, which looked at the management, working practices and performance of the London Ambulance Service, was established following the unacceptable delays in providing an ambulance for Nasima Begum on the night of 19 June. The report sets out clearly both the progress which the LAS has made since the report of the independent inquiry in February 1993 and the substantial agenda of further work which is needed to improve its performance to the standard achieved by other ambulance services.

I welcome the report's analysis and the key recommendations arising from it. Most of these are for the LAS and the South Thames regional health authority to implement and I look to it to do this vigorously to the challenging timetable set out in the report. Achieving these changes will require all staff in the LAS and the LAS management, to work together. I have asked Mr. Wells, as chairman of the South Thames RHA, to report regularly on progress to Ministers in addition to producing the quarterly public reports proposed in the report.

The report recommends that the LAS should seek trust status and that it should remain as a single unit for providing emergency ambulance services for London. I welcome the conclusion about trust status for the LAS. This would, in principle, clarify and strengthen management and accountability for the LAS and I agree that preparatory work should begin now. I also agree that the LAS should remain as a single unit but with the very important proviso that this can be justified only if the LAS improves its performance to the standards achieved by other services.

Finally, the report recommends that there should be a review of national standards for ambulance response times. My Department has already set action in hand for such a review this year and will take into account the points made in the review report.

Public Bodies

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department *(a)* hold open meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and whether this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 December 1994]:* The information is as follows:

(a) *hold open meetings:* None

(b) *conduct public consultation exercises:* British Pharmacopoeia Commission; Nutrition Task Force;

(c) *conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests:* British Pharmacopoeia Commission; Nutrition Task Force;

(d) *Publish a register of members' interests:* Committee on Safety of Medicines (on a voluntary basis); Medicines Commission (on a

voluntary basis); The advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food; Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment; Committee on the Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment; Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment; Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy; Committee on Dental and Surgical Materials; Advisory Board on the Registration of Homeopathic Products;

(e) *publish agendas for meetings:* None

(f) *publish the minutes of meetings:*

(i) *under a statutory requirement:* None

(ii) *voluntarily:* Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food Policy.

GPs and Dentists

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population in each family health service authority area is registered currently with *(a)* a general practitioner and *(b)* a general dental practitioner.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Information on the proportion of patients registered with a general medical practitioner is shown in the table. Available information on registration with a dental practitioner is in the Dental Practice Board publication "Registrations: GDS Quarterly Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Proportion of people resident in each FHSA who were registered with a GP 1993–94

FHSA	Estimated total resident population at mid 1993	Registered patients at 1 Oct. 1993	Per cent.
Northern RHA			
Cleveland	557,286	573,355	102.9
Cumbria	491,874	494,210	100.5
Durham	604,131	610,182	101.0
Northumberland	309,019	307,994	99.7
Gateshead	202,787	211,773	104.4
Newcastle	275,217	290,477	105.5
North Tyneside	193,495	191,635	99.0
South Tyneside	156,281	160,444	102.7
Sunderland	295,951	298,783	101.0
	3,086.041	3,138.853	101.7
Yorkshire RHA			
Humberside	882,733	892,995	101.2
North Yorkshire	733,981	726,107	98.9
Bradford	478,871	498,894	104.2
Calderdale	194,357	199,496	102.6
Kirklees	380,732	385,272	101.2
Leeds	719,880	731,043	101 6
Wakefield	317,943	330,172	103.8
	3,708,497	3,763,979	101.5
Trent RHA			
Derbyshire	949,702	953,764	100.4
Leicestershire	907,576	931,810	102.7
Lincolnshire	602,722	605,103	100.4
Nottinghamshire	1,027,600	1,015,682	98.8
Barnsley	224,198	231,908	103.4
Doncaster	294,394	296,615	100.8
Rotherham	256,493	252,026	98.3
Sheffield	525,387	530,608	101.0
	4,788,072	4,817,516	100.6
East Anglia RHA			
Cambridgeshire	688,395	659,863	95.9
Norfolk	768,759	735,056	95.6
Suffolk	665,062	638,939	96.1
	2,122,216	2,033,858	95.8

Proportion of people resident in each FHSA who were registered with a GP 1993–94

FHSA	Estimated total resident population at mid 1993	Registered patients at 1 Oct. 1993	Per cent.
North West Thames RHA			
Bedfordshire	539,737	571,500	105.9
Hertfordshire	995,681	1,036,258	104.1
Barnet	306,691	361,439	117.9
Brent and Harrow	450,807	560,106	124.2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	647,164	825,644	127.6
Hillingdon	240,156	244,042	101.6
Kensington Chelsea and Westminster	339,330	413,167	121.8
	3,519,566	4,012,156	114.0
North East Thames RHA			
Essex	1,564,673	1,582,637	101.1
Barking and Havering	373,998	391,552	104.7
Camden and Islington	356,223	443,531	124.5
City and East London	590,117	697,054	118.1
Enfield and Haringey	466,444	542,419	116.3
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	447,799	464,654	103.8
	3,799,254	4,121,847	108.5
South East Thames RHA			
East Sussex	723,252	731,975	101.2
Kent	1,551,464	1,583,583	102.1
Greenwich and Bexley	436,818	441,546	101.1
Bromley	300,271	301,464	100.4
Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham	723,696	869,658	120.2
	3,735,501	2,928,226	105.2
South West Thames RHA			
Surrey	1,033,462	1,061,272	102.7
West Sussex	723,637	745,978	103.1
Croydon	320,881	338,277	105.4
Kingston and Richmond	309,028	322,917	104.5
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	601,405	645,079	107.3
	2,988,413	3,113,523	104.2
Wessex RHA			
Dorset	671,181	677,774	101.0
Hampshire	1,595,950	1,602,384	100.4
Wiltshire	587,895	561,942	95.6
Isle of Wight	126,656	126,474	99.9
	2,981,682	2,968,574	99.6
Oxford RHA			
Berkshire	764,097	802,031	105.0
Buckinghamshire	659,288	662,442	100.5
Northamptonshire	599,634	596,526	99.5
Oxfordshire	588,051	597,611	101.6
	2,611,070	2,658,610	101.8
South Western RHA			
Avon	966,489	994,668	102.9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	483,114	478,040	98.9
Devon	1,052,488	1,031,592	98,0

Proportion of people resident in each FHSA who were registered with a GP 1993–94

FHSA	Estimated total resident population at mid 1993	Registered patients at 1 Oct. 1993	Per cent.
Gloucestershire	544,449	552,682	101.5
Somerset	476,153	469,561	98.6
	3,522,693	3,526,543	100.1
West Midlands RHA			
Hereford and Worcester	694,411	682,018	98.2
Shropshire	417,005	407,434	97.7
Staffordshire	1,059,474	1,023,646	96,6
Warwickshire	492,357	502,370	102.0
Birmingham	1,004,258	1,068,805	106.4
Coventry	300,515	325,178	108.2
Dudley	310,663	319,786	102.9
Sandwell	292,431	316,347	108.2
Solihull	203,364	221,756	109.0
Walsall	263,261	267,984	101.8
Wolverhampton	245,742	258,337	105.1
	5,283,481	5,393,661	102.1
Mersey RHA			
Cheshire	976.735	992,462	101.6
Liverpool	466,864	493,005	105.6
St. Helens and Knowsley	335,232	354,729	105.8
Sefton	295,501	289,070	97.8
Wirral	335,943	341,934	101.8
	2,410,275	2,471,200	102.5
North Western RHA			
Lancashire	1,419,625	1,423,984	100.3
Bolton	265,692	272,058	102.4
Bury	180,969	183,415	101.4
Manchester	433,706	476,980	110.0
Oldham	221,185	213,580	96.6
Rochdale	207,033	213,858	103.3
Salford	227,161	245,733	108.2
Stockport	290,594	295,034	101.5
Tameside	220,406	216,056	98.0
Trafford	214,979	221,441	103.0
Wigan	311,688	292,774	93.9
England	48,549,799	50,003,459	103.0

The resident population includes members of Her Majesty's forces in England but the population registered with a General Practitioner excludes Her Majesty's Forces patients who move from one family health services authority area to another do not automatically change general practitioners at the same time.
This will influence the percentage outcomes shown in the table.

Capital Projects

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* directly managed units which have received funding from (i) the Department of Health and (ii) the private sector for capital projects in each of the last four years, showing in each case the amount of funding involved.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 15 December 1994]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Capital funding for directly managed units is a matter for their parent district health authorities and information about individual units is not available centrally. National health service trusts are not funded directly for capital expenditure. Projects are financed by a combination of internally generated resources from trading, principally depreciation and retained surpluses, and loans. The NHS Executive controls the total expenditure of NHS trusts through external financing limits which allow for capital expenditure up to a certain approved level. The actual amount of capital expenditure is for each trust to determine provided expenditure is contained within its external financing limit. A table will be placed in the Library showing actual expenditure on capital assets, excluding donated assets, by each NHS trust. Information is provided for the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94. There were no NHS trusts prior to 1991–92.

NHS trusts do not normally use private sector funds for capital expenditure since loans are available to them from the NHS Executive at Treasury rates. NHS trusts principally use the private sector to obtain overdrafts to fund working capital requirements.

Termination Payments

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many termination payments have been made by national health service trusts to chief executives and general and senior managers; and what is the total amount for each trust to date.

Mr. Malone *[pursuant to his reply, 9 December 1994, column 395]:* I regret that my previous reply contained the following clerical errors:

i) the overall number of termination payments to National Health Service chief executives, senior and general managers notified to the NHS Executive was 54 rather than 48. The total failed to include some late notifications, although these are in the amounts shown for individual trusts;

ii) the total amount for Broadgreen Hospital NHS Trust was £42,888 not £81,838. The figure was incorrectly shown against Burton Hospitals NHS Trust; and

iii) The total amount for Burton Hospital NHS Trust was £7,053 not £42,888.

Prescription Costs

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of prescription drugs cost less than £5.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of prescriptions cost less than £5; what is the *(a)* average and *(b)* median cost of a prescription item; how many prescriptions were issued by doctors in the last year; how many prescriptions items were dispensed by pharmacists last year, in total, and by the family health service authority area; and what has been the total revenue generated by charging for prescriptions in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Malone *[pursuant to his reply, 9 December 1994, column 397]:* I regret that some of the figures in the table "*Percentage distribution by total cost of prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors and prescription items personally administered by prescribing doctors in England in 1993, and the average total cost of such items*" placed in the Library are incorrect. A correct table has been placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 January 1995

ENVIRONMENT

Strategic Development Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each county and local authority the allocation of funding that has been made under the strategic development scheme and its predecessor schemes, including the urban programmes, rural initiatives, projects of national and regional importance and special projects, for each of the last four years and for 1994–95.

Mr. Curry: I assume that the hon. Member's question relates to the single regeneration budget, which brings together 20 Government initiatives, including the urban programme, directed at urban and other areas. As the SRB includes programmes and projects which operate across local authority areas, information is not available in the form sought. However, the Department's 1994 annual report included details for all the SRB component programmes of total expenditure in each of the last four years and planned expenditure for 1994–95. Details of all successful bids for new SRB funding were sent to the hon. Member on 5 December.

Councillors' Allowances

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he intends to make to the system of councillors' remuneration allowances following the consultation exercise he undertook earlier in the year.

Mr. Curry: In the light of the comments that we received during the consultation, my right hon. Friend will bring forward amending regulations which will give local authorities in England and Wales much greater discretion to decide how much councillors should be paid in allowances.

The current system of allowances is too prescriptive and places an unnecessary burden on local authorities. The changes to the system we propose to make will remove that burden and will encourage people with a wide range of skills to serve as councillors.

The draft regulations will:

(a) remove the overall limit on what may be spent by authorities on their allowances schemes;

(b) remove the requirement on local authorities to pay a special responsibility allowance or allowances and, where they decide they will pay such allowances, remove the upper limit on the level of allowances which can be paid to individual councillors; where special responsibility allowances are paid, the requirement that at least one member of a minority group on each authority should receive a special responsibility allowance will continue;

(c) require the payment of a basic allowance to all councillors—but will not specify the level of allowance to be paid;

(d) permit the payment of attendance allowances and specify a range of single member duties which will be eligible for the payment of attendance allowances—these will be limited to statutory duties which councillors must perform but for which, currently, they are not able to claim attendance allowances if they perform them alone—including visits to children's homes, other social services residential establishments and special schools; and

(e) require local authorities to publish details of the allowances schemes they make and to publish an annual report of the payments made to individual councillors under the scheme in order to ensure accountability.

My right hon. Friend will shortly consult local government about draft regulations which will implement the new system. The new allowances system will be in place from 1 April 1995.

Vacant Dwellings

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress local authorities are making in reducing the numbers of vacant dwellings which they own.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am pleased to announce that, in response to the Government's encouragement, local authorities have maintained the progress made in recent years. For the ninth successive year, there has been a drop in the number of empty homes.

As at 1 April 1994, the total number of empty council homes stood at some 70,300, representing 1.9 per cent. of the stock. This is a 40 per cent. reduction since 1985, when the number stood at over 116,000.

Within the overall total "management vacants"—those ready for occupation immediately or after minor works—stood at some 40,600. Management vacants provide an indication of the empty homes available to meet housing need. I am placing in the Library a list of local authorities ranked on the basis of the numbers of management vacants as at 1 April 1994.

I want to see the best use of existing council stock. An empty home is a wasted resource which could provide a home for people who need it.

I look to local authorities to sustain their efforts to keep their own empty dwellings to a minimum and to develop strategies which help to bring empty properties in all tenures back into use.

Mineral Permissions

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make public the results of consultation responses on the document "Old Mineral Permissions 1948–1981", issued by his Department in March 1994.

Sir Paul Beresford: Yes. I have today placed copies of a list of all those who responded to the consultation together with a summary of their views in the Libraries of the House. A copy of any individual response can be inspected in the library of my Department.

Local Government Commission

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the representations he has received on the recommendations of the Local Government Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We intend that when we lay implementation orders for each area where the Local Government Commission recommends change to the structure of local government, we will place in the Library a summary of the representations we have received about the recommendations. We will also, on request, make available the individual representations where the writers have indicated that their letters may be published; where necessary, we will ask public bodies who make representations whether they are willing for us to release those representations. Where individual members of the public write to Ministers in the expectation that their views will be treated in confidence, we believe that expectation should be respected. We will therefore regard those representations as not intended for publication unless there is a clear indication to the contrary.

TRANSPORT

Railways

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish, as soon as is practicable after the publication of each twice-yearly national railway timetable, details of changes involving disadvantage to the public travelling on any route of railway which is: *(a)* a reduction in the quality or extent of the service and *(b)* a change in the general or particular level of each category of fares changed, including that of concessionary or travel card arrangements.

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for British Rail at present. In the future, franchise agreements will include provisions to limit the extent to which service levels and, where appropriate, fares may be changed. Within those limits changes will be a matter for franchisees.

Automatic Train Protection

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what revision he has made, or is considering, or what proposals he has received from the Health and Safety Executive concerning a revision to the acceptance by Her Majesty's Government of the recommendations of the Hidden inquiry into the Clapham rail accident for the installation of a system of automatic train protection on all lines now the responsibility of Railtrack.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend has recently received advice from the Health and Safety Commission on the report on automatic train protection which British Rail submitted last year. Copies of the BR report are available in the Library of the House.

We expect to receive Railtrack's comments on the report soon. We will consider the views of the Health and Safety Commission and Railtrack carefully, and respond as soon as possible.

Highway Inquiries

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the effect of the revised rules governing highway inquiries.

Mr. Watts: Revised Highways (Inquiries Procedure) Rules and Compulsory Purchase by Ministers (Inquiries Procedure) Rules were laid before the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor on 20 December 1994.

The consultation document prompted over 80 responses. The proposals to update the inquiry rules governing highway inquiries were widely welcomed. The main changes in the new rules are:

—pre-inquiry meetings will have a formal standing;
—inspectors will be allowed to set a timetable for the inquiry;
—specific time targets can be set to ensure that the inquiry is held as quickly and as efficiently as possible;
—written proofs of evidence will be submitted before the inquiry with summaries if the main proofs are long;
—only these summaries will usually be read out at the inquiry;
—inspectors will have the right to refuse irrelevant or repetitious evidence.

The new rules, which came into force on 10 January, eliminate bureaucratic procedures without affecting people's rights to object to road schemes.

In future transcripts will be taken at all inquiries expected to sit for more than 16 days.

A summary of responses to the consultation document which lists the main points arising from the consultation process, and gives the Government's response, has been placed in the Library.

WALES

GP Fundholding Steering Committee

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the GP fundholding steering committee concerning the participation of GP fundholders in the achievement of "The Health of the Nation" objectives.

Mr. Redwood: None. "The Health of the Nation" does not apply in Wales.

Cash Limits

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he proposes to make to the European regional development fund and local authority capital cash limits for his Department for the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The European regional development fund cash limit—WO/ERDF—will be reduced by £7,000,000 from £55,000,000 to £48,000,000. The local authority capital limit—WO/LACAP—will be increased by £7,000,000 from £483,215,000 to £490,215,000.

The reduction in the WO/ERDF cash limit results from a lower than expected take-up of ERDF provision during the year.

The increase in WO/LACAP provides for additional housing supplementary credit approvals for mandatory renovation and disabled facilities grants.

Neither of these proposed changes will add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Four Motors Programme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how Wales is represented in material publicising the Four Motors programme; and if he will make a statement about Wales's role in the programme.

Mr. Redwood: Wales is not a member of the Four Motor grouping. However, given progress to date in

bilateral relations with the group members, Wales is being invited to participate in what are otherwise Four Motor initiatives and events. Where Wales does participate, the host region ensures that Wales is included in the promotional material. When Four Motor events occur in Wales, such as the environmental impacts seminar held in Swansea in November 1993, Wales deals with any publicity for the event.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Boards of Visitors

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of his Department in informing people seeking to be members of boards of visitors in prisons in England and Wales of the reasons for any delay that may occur in the consideration of their appointment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am aware that there have been too many delays in appointments in the past and I have asked for the system to be streamlined. However, some delays will continue to occur because of the need to obtain security clearance.

Market Testing

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated internal cost of each market testing exercise within his Department since 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Up to 30 September 1994, the estimated internal costs of conducting the market tests in the non-prisons programmes and the resulting estimated annual savings in delivery of these services were as follows:

Market test	*Cost* £	*Annual savings* £
Statistics data collection	236,009	182,962
Central training services	126,720	245,355
Central typing services	99,749	1,186,125
Reprographic and design and illustration services	140,086	1,016,444
Departmental computer services	1,196,881	4,785,333
Immigration and nationality department security guards	107,940	304,973
Internal audit	163,735	245,355
Record storage and retrieval	105,251	186,442
Immigration and nationality department typing services	102,619	n/a

n/a = Information not yet available

Information on individual Prison Service market tests is not available, but the overall estimated internal cost of managing the Prison Service "Competing for Quality" programme, which includes strategic contracting out, from April 1992 to September 1994 was £3,134,000. The estimated annual savings are £15,062,854.

Police Authorities

Mr. Beith : To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many names of people from ethnic minorities were included in the lists of suggested independent members of police authorities forwarded to him by the selection panels of these authorities.

Mr. Maclean: A total of 808 people were nominated by the local selection panels for appointment as independent members of the 41 new police authorities; 57 were from ethnic minorities.

Reconvictions

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the current reconviction rates for persons commencing probation orders and community service orders and for persons discharged from custodial sentences.

Mr. Howard: The information is as follows:

Percentage of offenders reconvicted [1] within a two-year period following commencement of an order in 1987–90 or discharged in 1987–90 from a custodial sentence

	Percentage
Probation order	54
Community service order	56
Custodial sentence	54

[1] Reconvicted of a serious offence as defined by the standard list in appendix 4 of Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1993.

Comparisons between different types of sentence are affected by differences in the age, sex, previous convictions and other characteristics of the offenders receiving the sentences, as described in the forthcoming Home Office Research Study, "Explaining reconviction rates: a critical analysis".

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male and female asylum seekers have since the beginning of the war in former Yugoslavia *(a)* been sent back by British officials at a United Kingdom port of entry to a safe third country, listing the countries *(b)* been refused visas at any British embassy or consulate in the former Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary or Poland and *(c)* been deported from the United Kingdom to any part of the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The table gives the available information on the number of removals and voluntary departures of asylum applicants from the former Yugoslavia for 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Removals and voluntary departures of asylum applicants from the former Yugoslavia, excluding dependents, 1992 to 1994

	Number of persons		
	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Port cases	120	126	66
Illegal entry and deportation cases	3	3	7

Information on the destination of those nationals of the former Yugoslavia removed or voluntarily departed is only available for the period 26 July 1993 to 31 December 1994, and is given in the following table.

Destination of former Yugoslav asylum applicants, removed or voluntarily departed, 26 July 1993–31 December 1994

Number of persons

	Destination	
	Country other than the former Yugoslavia	*Former Yugoslavia*
Port cases	62	51
Illegal entry and deportation cases	5	6
Total[1]	67	57

[1] The 67 former Yugoslavs removed or voluntarily departed to a country other than the former Yugoslavia comprised 50 males and 17 females; the 57 removed or voluntarily departed to the former Yugoslavia comprised 41 males and 16 females.

Of the 62 former Yugoslav port cases. 45 male and 17 female, who were removed or voluntarily departed to a country other than the former Yugoslavia, the countries they were removed or voluntary departed to were:

Male	*Female*
11 France	5 France
7 Bulgaria	2 Bulgaria
6 Germany	2 Italy
5 Sweden	2 Sweden
2 Turkey	1 Hungary
2 Hungary	1 Norway
2 Norway	1 Germany
2 Italy	1 Czechoslovakia
2 Spain	1 Turkey
1 Saudi Arabia	1 United States of America
1 Albania	
1 United States of America	
1 Switzerland	
1 Austria	
1 Holland	

No nationals of the former Yugoslavia are being removed to war zones.

Information on the number of former Yugoslavs refused visas at British embassies of consulates in the former Yugoslavia, Austria, Poland or Hungary is not available.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what powers he has appointed his advisory committee for the Metropolitan police; how many of its members he has appointed directly, how many after the advice of the committee chairman and how many he has asked the chairman to appoint personally; how often he plans to meet the committee personally; how often he expects the committee to meet the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis; and if the agenda and minutes of the committee will be published.

Mr. Maclean: All the members of the Metropolitan Police Committee will be appointed by the Home Secretary, in consultation with the chairman. My right hon. and learned Friend expects to meet members of the committee personally from time to time, and for the committee to meet the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis or his representatives regularly. The committee's advice to Ministers will be confidential and it will be for the new committee to consider, once it is established, what reports it should make publicly available. My right hon. and learned Friend requires no specific power to appoint advisers.

PRIME MINISTER

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

The Prime Minister: My office is currently studying options which would provide electronic mail access to Downing street. A decision on the feasibility of such a service will be made as soon as possible.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

The Prime Minister: My office is about to begin trials of a system that will connect Downing street to the Internet. The trial will examine the possibility of offering a World Wide Web service to Downing street. The trial will also examine ways of allowing users to electronically retrieve documents which would normally be available through more traditional sources. Any system chosen would not replace any of these normal distributions methods.

TREASURY

Inland Revenue Executive Offices

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the organisation of the executive offices in the Inland Revenue.

Sir George Young: The Inland Revenue has announced a further move towards a smaller number of executive offices.

With effect from 1 April 1995, the two regional executive offices—Inland Revenue Greater Manchester and Inland Revenue North West—will merge. The new headquarters will be in Bootle. The headquarters office in Stockport will close. From the same date, two executive offices which provide mainly internal services within the Inland Revenue—the financial services offices and the financial and management accounting systems office—will also merge.

Civil Service (Delegations)

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what delegations have been made in 1994 under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992; to whom those delegations were made; and what were the main conditions that were attached to them.

Sir George Young: The table lists delegations made under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act

1992 since the last report to Parliament, *Official Report*, 13 January 1994, column *246*. In some cases, for staff appointed by statutory office holders, Ministers were statutorily required to give consent to terms and conditions of service. For such staff, delegation has been effected by waiving that requirement, subject to the conditions attached to the delegation.

The delegation of terms and conditions of service applies generally across the civil service except where the answer makes it clear that this is not the case.

List of Delegations made in 1994 under the civil service (management functions) Act 1992

Delegation	*Nature of delegation*	*Recipients*	*Main conditions*
1. Boarding school allowance.	Authority to determine the eligibility for and amounts of assistance that may be paid to members of the home civil service who are posted overseas and incur fees to educate a child in the UK as a result.	Ministers in charge of departments and statutory and certain other office holders[1].	Schooling allowance will be payable only: (i) when the officer has sole parental responsibility for the child, or is accompanied on the overseas posting at public expenses by a spouse who either has sole parental responsibility or joint responsibility with the officer; and (ii) if the department is satisfied that the nature, place, timing and duration of the officer's overseas posting make boarding school or other education in the UK desirable; and (iii) if the department accepts that the officer incurs the expenditure solely because of the overseas posting; and (iv) on proof of actual fees by an educational institution in the UK at which the child (while under the age of nineteen) pursues full time academic or vocational studies; and (v) when the costs of exercising this delegation can be met from within existing running costs and cash limits.
2. Terms and conditions of service of industrial employees.	Authority to set the terms and conditions of service of industrial employees in their respective departments.	Ministers in charge of departments and statutory office holders, as appropriate for the following departments[1] FCO HO DTI DTp MOD MAFF DNH DOE PSA WO DSS SO NIO DoH First Crown Estates Commissioner	Departments and Agencies must: (i) continue to comply with certain sections of the civil service management code. (ii) ensure that any changes made to the terms and conditions specified must provide value for money and be made in a way which does not jeopardise essential public expenditure safeguards.
3. Recruitment and retention allowance	Authority to determine for home civil servants in their respective departments and working in the UK eligibility for and amount of new recruitment and retention allowance.	Ministers in charge of departments and statutory and certain other office holders[1].	(i) The new recruitment and retention allowance may be paid only to meet locational, posting, discipline related or other recruitment and retention problems; (ii) Departments and agencies must ensure that use of the RRA represents value for money and does not jeopardise essential public expenditure safeguards;

List of Delegations made in 1994 under the civil service (management functions) Act 1992

Delegation	*Nature of delegation*	*Recipients*	*Main conditions*
			(iii) the allowance must not exceed £3,000 a year and must not be paid above grade 4 level; (iv) Departments and agencies may decide to make it pensionable, non-pensionable or part pensionable to reflect different types of recruitment and retention problems; (v) Departments and agencies must take the cost of pensionability into account in considering whether the RRA should be pensionable or not; (vi) details of the RRA arrangements, including pensionability provision, must be given to all staff and made clear to new staff in letters of appointment.
4. Recruitment and retention allowance for staff overseas.	as above	Ministers in charge of departments and statutory and certain office holders.	as above
5. Delegation of pay and certain conditions of service.	Authority to determine pay and certain pay-related conditions of service of civil servants below the senior open structure (with the exception of retirement and redundancy, the reinstatement and re-employment of persons in the service and the re-deployment of staff between departments). Agency chief executives are also excluded from the scope of the delegations.	Ministers in charge of departments and statutory officeholders[1], as appropriate, for the following organisations: Agricultural Development and Advisory Service Social Security Benefits Agency Social Security Contributions Agency HM Customs and Excise Defence Research Agency Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency Driving Standards Agency HM Stationery Office HM Prison Service Health and Safety Executive Social Security Information Technology Service Agency Meteorological Office Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre Royal Mint Scottish Prison Service Vehicle Inspectorate.	(i) The recipient must continue to comply with certain sections of the civil service management code. (ii) Changes made to terms and conditions must provide value for money and be made in a way which does not jeopardise essential public expenditure safeguards.

1. Statutory and Certain Other Office Holders
First Parliamentary Counsel
Government Actuary
Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies
National Debt Commissioners/National Public Works Loan Commissioners
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce
Board of the Inland Revenue[(i)]
Commissioners for Customs and Excise[(i)]
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, Wales[(ii)]
The Franchising Director, Office of Passenger Rail Franchising[(ii)]
The Rail Regulator[(ii)]
Director General of the National Lottery[(ii)]

(i) Recruitment and retention allowance delegation does not apply to departments which have delegated authority over pay and pay-related functions on 1 April 1994.

(ii) Also received in 1994 delegation of minimum recruitment criteria made originally to Ministers in charge of departments and certain other office holders in 1993.

Staff of Bodies Covered by Statutory Provisions
Crown Estate Office (CEO)
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)
Office of Fair Trading (OFT)
Office of Gas Supply (OFGAS)
Office of Electricity Regulation (Offer)
Office of Her Majesty's chief Inspector of Schools, Wales[(i)]
Office of the National Lottery (Oflot)[(i)]
Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)
Office of Telecommunications (Oftel)
Office of Water Services (Ofwat)
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF)[(i)]
Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR)[(i)]
Procurator Fiscal Service (PFS)
Serious Fraud Office (SFO)

(i) Also received in 1994 delegations on travel, overseas accountable entertainment allowance, United Kingdom relocation expenses and rents for key staff occupying government-owned residential properties made originally to Ministers in charge of departments and certain other office holders in 1993.

HEALTH

Severe Arthritis and Emphysema

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will advise health authorities and NHS trusts that the use of normal X-ray film is unsuitable for the detection or assessment of severe arthritis and emphysema.

Mr. Sackville: These are technical and clinical issues for which the Department looks to the relevant professional bodies to provide guidance.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken by Her Majesty's Government to trace those who may be at risk of having been infected with hepatitis C as a result of blood transfusions.

Mr. Sackville: The Government have accepted the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues for Transplantation that a look back exercise should be undertaken with a view to tracing, counselling and treating those who may have inadvertently been infected with hepatitis C through blood transfusions given in this country. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has directed that this exercise should be undertaken as quickly as possible and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are making similar arrangements to ensure a co-ordinated United Kingdom approach.

The Chairman of the Advisory Committee has been asked to bring together without delay an ad hoc working party of experts to draw up guidance on the procedures for undertaking the look back exercise and for counselling those identified as being at risk as well as guidance on the treatment options available.

The blood service in the United Kingdom continues to be one of the safest in the world and donors and patients should have the highest confidence that the standard of the service will be upheld.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Exclusion Orders

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many exclusion orders have been *(a)* imposed, *(b)* revoked, *(c)* reimposed at the expiry of a previous order and *(d)* allowed to lapse in the last 12 months.

Sir John Wheeler: In the period 1 January to 31 December 1994, one exclusion order was imposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. No orders were revoked, reimposed or allowed to lapse by my Department.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to revoke all exclusion orders made under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts.

Sir John Wheeler: The continuing need for all security measures necessitated by terrorism, including exclusion orders, is kept under close review. The Government do not intend to maintain the emergency legislation any longer than is necessary and looks forward to a day when the need for emergency legislation, including the exclusion powers, will be redundant. It would be wrong, however, to lower our guard prematurely.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many exclusion orders made under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts are currently in force.

Sir John Wheeler: Ten orders made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and a further 59 orders made by the Home Secretary are currently in force.

Railways

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what conclusions he has reached on the findings of the study carried out on the scope for introducing a private element into the management and operation of Northern Ireland Railways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: This study was commissioned as a result of a commitment given in the citizens charter for Northern Ireland. The consultants' preferred option for introducing a private element into Northern Ireland Railways was the establishment of a single vertically integrated franchise for passenger and infrastructure operations. The consultants advised, however, that any franchising programme in Northern Ireland should follow rather than lead franchising in Great Britain. The consultants also made recommendations concerning the sale of non-core businesses, such as freight and travel agency operations, and the market testing of other activities.

In view of the consultants' reservations about timing, and bearing in mind that railways services in Northern Ireland are on a relatively small scale compared to those in Great Britain, I have decided to defer a decision on the franchising of railway services for the time being. I would propose, however, to implement the consultants' proposals about the sale of NIR's non-core businesses and the market testing of other activities. I have also asked NIR to examine the scope for involving private sector finance in their capital programme.

Social Fund

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a further allocation of funds to the discretionary social fund budget in the current financial year.

Mr. Moss: I am very pleased to announce that the Northern Ireland social fund discretionary budget for 1994–95 will be increased by a total of £400,000 as a result of better than expected loan recoveries by the Social Security Agency.

The budget for loans will be increased by £303,600 while the budget for grants will be increased by £96,400 increasing the original allocation to £20,463,600 and £9,736,400 respectively.

This increase in the social fund budget will ensure that more people receive help and that the fund continues to play an important role in targeting resources on those most in need.

Details of the revised budget have been placed in the Library.

Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide details of the three visits made outside the United Kingdom by the independent commissioner for the holding centres in his official capacity since his appointment, listing the countries visited, the purpose and the total cost to public funds of each visit.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* Since his appointment in December 1992, the independent commissioner made three visits in that capacity outside the United Kingdom.

From 3 to 7 June 1994, the commissioner visited the United States of America where he met officials of the British embassy in Washington DC, the head of the North European Bureau of the United States State Department, Congressional officials, facilitated by the director of United States congressional human rights caucus, a senior representative and members of Amnesty International, lawyers from New Jersey with a particular interest in Northern Ireland affairs, representatives from Human Rights Watch (New York), the executive director and members of the United States Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (New York), representatives of non-governmental organisations concerned with prisoner's rights, and a senior representative of the New York Bar Association's council for international affairs.

On 21 July 1994 the commissioner visited Dublin where he met Mr. Dick Spring, the Tanaiste, a senior Garda officer and officials from the departments of Health and Justice.

From 11 to 20 September 1994 the commissioner returned to the United States of America to attend, at the invitation of their president, the annual conference in Florida of the International Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement, where he also met members of the United States Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (New York), members of the New York Bar Association, Human Rights Watch (New York) and some press/media representatives from New York and District.

The total cost to public funds in respect of each visit was as follows:

3–7 June 1994: £1,200
21 July 1994: £300
11–20 September 1994: £3,000

Stevens Report

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the chief constable of Northumbria made his report to the Director of Public Prosecutions of Northern Ireland and the chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; what plans he has to publish it; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The original report by Mr. Stevens was forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions and a copy made available to the Secretary of State. A summary of the report was published on 17 May 1990 and a copy was placed in the House of Commons Library.

Supplementary reports by Mr. Stevens were forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions on 25 April 1994 and 18 October 1994, respectively, for consideration. The DPP has conferred with Mr. Stevens and certain further inquiries are to be carried out.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Management Information Systems

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) which Departments which do not yet have a fully developed MINIS-type management information system; and what are the target dates for the introduction of such a system in each case;

(2) which Departments have in place a fully developed MINIS-type management information system; and on what date each system was introduced.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: A number of Departments have developed management information systems similar to MINIS since the launch of the financial management initiative in 1982. The main responsibility for developing such systems rests with Departments. A multi-departmental efficiency scrutiny is currently examining management information and planning systems and is expected to report in the spring. The work of the scrutiny team shows that the Department of Environment, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Export Credits Guarantee Department, and the Government Offices for the Regions each have a management information system called MINIS although they are not identical. These were introduced in 1980, 1992, 1993 and 1994 respectively. The management information systems in other Government Departments have different names.

The aim of the current scrutiny is to ensure that these systems reflect the new structure of central Government and best practice developed in the public and private sectors over the last decade.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Projects (Prime Ministerial Scrutiny)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the ministerial correspondence relating to the Ankara metro project under the aid and trade provision scheme was copied to No. 10 for prime ministerial approval; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In view of the size and importance of the Ankara Metro project, the ministerial correspondence on it was copied to No. 10 for the information—rather than the approval—of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what projects under the ATP programme the papers were sent to No. 10 Downing street for the views of the Prime Minister between 1980 and 1992; at whose request; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 10 January 1995:]:* No records are held centrally of the information requested and gathering such information could be done only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incomes

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the change in average annual income at constant 1994 prices between 1979 and the latest date for which figures are available of the poorest 10th and richest 10th of households comprising *(a)* a single adult, *(b)* a couple no children, *(c)* a couple with child aged three years, *(d)* a couple with child aged 16 years, *(e)* a couple with children aged three and eight years, *(f)* a couple with children aged three, eight and 11 years and *(g)* a couple with children aged 11, 16 and 17 years.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested. This Department does not produce statistics on the distribution of annual incomes. Estimates of income distribution provided relate to current income at the time a survey respondent is interviewed.

Reliable estimates of changes in the average income of the family groups requested are not available for the lowest and highest tenth of the income distribution as the sample sizes are too small.

Figures giving the change in real income of the bottom fifth of the income distribution for particular family types are in table A4 of "Households Below Average Income 1979–1991–92", a copy of which is in the Library. Corresponding information for the top fifth is given in the table.

Changes in real income for family type, 1979–1991–92

Real percentage changes in median income (top quintile)

Family type groups	*Before housing costs*	*After housing costs*
Pensioner couple	35 to 77	47 to 92
Single pensioner	33 to 63	45 to 78
Couple with children	56	54
Couple without children	51	56
Single with children	8 to 43	1 to 39
Single without children	45	45

Notes:

1. Income change estimates relate to the median income in each quintile; income is net equivalised household income before or after housing costs. Range estimates are given where the range in which the true change lies exeeds 20 percentage points. This is more likely at the top of the income distribution (top quintile) of each family type.
2. Range estimates show the range in which the true change will lie, 95 times out of 100.
3. Results have not been checked for sensitivity to the use of different equivalence scales.

Social Fund

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the calculations leading to the increase from 23 November in the social fund loans budget for the South Gwent and Islwyn district office of the Benefits Agency.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr Paul Flynn, dated 10 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the calculations leading to the recent increase in the Social Fund loans budget for the South Gwent and Islwyn District Office.

The principles underlying allocations to the Social Fund in April 1994 and November 1994 were placed in the Library at the time of the allocations.

The South Gwent and Islwyn District Office Social Fund annual loans budget was £1,290,652 from April 1994. Ministers approved an increase of 4% to the budget with effect from 23 November 1994, subject to any adjustment within a limit of plus or minus 0.8% to cover local factors considered appropriate by the Benefits Agency's Area Director for Wales.

Taking local circumstances into account, in particular the fact that flooding in the District was likely to lead to an increase in claims, the Area Director recommended that the proposed 4% additional allocation of £51,626 should be further increased to 4.8% giving an overall increase of £61,951.

As a result, the current 1994–95 Social Fund loans budget for the South Gwent and Islwyn District Office is £1,352,603.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give his Department's estimate of the number of absent parents who currently *(a)* are liable for assessment for paying maintenance for children under the Child Support Act 1991, *(b)* have been sent assessment forms by the Child Support Agency, *(c)* have had their assessment completed by the agency and *(d)* are regularly paying maintenance under the terms of the agency's assessment; and if he will estimate how long it will be until all those who are liable for assessment currently will have had their assessment completed.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 11 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the numbers of absent parents who are awaiting assessment, have been assessed and are paying regular maintenance.

As at the end of October, the Agency had received just over 1,100,000 applications for child maintenance from parents with care (PWC), involving around 1.2 million Absent Parents (APs). Maintenance enquiry forms have been issued to 637,000 of these APs, and maintenance assessments have been completed in 380,000 cases.

Some of these assessments will have resulted in maintenance being paid direct between the AP and the PWC. In 161,000 cases accounts have been set up for the collection of maintenance by the Agency. In 24,000 of these the AP had paid all the maintenance due, and in a further 44,000 cases the AP had partially paid it.

You also asked how long it would be until all those liable for assessment had their assessment completed. Ministers have recently announced measures intended help the Agency increase the speed with which cases are processed and to reduce the number of cases awaiting assessment. At this stage it is not possible to say when the arrears will be cleared. However I can assure you that we are taking all possible steps to deal with the outstanding cases as quickly as possible whilst giving a high priority to improving accuracy, customer service and increasing the amount of maintenance arranged and collected.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the criteria used by the Child Support Agency for deciding the order in which absent parents are assessed by the agency.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 11 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency's take on strategy.

Our criteria for taking on cases to assess child maintenance have been widely published. From April 1993 parents with care who apply for Income Support, Family Credit, or Disability Working Allowance are asked to authorise the CSA to seek maintenance on their behalf. Parents with care who make renewal claims for Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance will also usually be asked to give that authorisation.

New cases involving both benefit and non-benefit clients are the Agency's first priority. This takes into account the fact that no new court orders for child maintenance are being made, and the likelihood that no maintenance will have been paid before in these cases.

The Agency recently announced that it would temporarily defer taking on cases where parents with care have been on Income Support continuously since before April 1993 and have not already asked the Agency to take them on. However, the Agency will continue to give sympathetic consideration to those parents who do ask us to pursue their application.

Once we take on cases we do not categorise any group of absent parents or parents with care as having a higher priority than any other. We simply work through all of them as soon as we can although the varying circumstances and complexities of individual cases mean that, inevitably, some will be concluded quicker than others.

I hope this reply is helpful.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Oil and Gas Reserves

18. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how long present British oil and gas reserves will last at current levels of consumption.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Total British reserves of oil and gas in all known discoveries could, at 1993 rates of consumption, last respectively for 25 and 36 years. If the full potential from all possible future discoveries were to be included these would increase to some 58 years for oil and 57 years for gas.

Advice Service

19. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to support the provision of advice services through voluntary organisations funded by his Department.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department already indirectly supports the provision of advice services through its funding of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux which provides support services to local citizens advice bureaux.

Sizewell Nuclear Reactor

20. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress with the Sizewell pressurised water reactor.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Sizewell B reactor is now close to achieving full temperature. Initial criticality is expected to be achieved in the course of this month following which Nuclear Electric will progressively bring the reactor up to full power.

Business Link Initiative

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made with his business link initiative.

Mr. Heseltine: There are currently 66 business links operational and we have given approval for a further 122. We are on target for achieving a national network of around 200 outlets giving every firm in England access to a business link by the end of 1995.

National Grid

Mr. Miller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to ensure that customers benefit from the disposal of the National Grid.

Mr. Heseltine: Customers are already benefiting from the Government's privatisation programme and they will continue to do so.

It is not yet clear if or on what terms a disposal of NGC will proceed. Discussions with Government are at an early stage.

Arms Sales (Public Subsidy)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated annual public subsidy toward the sale of armaments.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Defence sales and civil capital goods business insured by ECGD are eligible for interest support under ECGD's fixed rate finance scheme, where credit terms of two years or more are involved. A sectoral breakdown of this support along the lines requested is not collected and is not readily obtainable.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Eastham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what positive steps his Department is pursuing to assist the aerospace industry in Britain over the next 10 years.

Mr. Eggar: My department is working to help the aerospace industry to improve its competitiveness, which must be the foundation of its future success. DTI supports the industry in forging international partnerships and pursuing major export opportunities. We are also funding research through the CARAD scheme and have provided launch aid for a number of major aerospace projects.

Gas Prices

26. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the levels of gas prices and the powers of the regulator.

Mr. Eggar: Since privatisation in 1986, gas prices excluding VAT for domestic customers have fallen in real terms by over 20 per cent., taking account of the recent price increase. The Director General of Gas Supply has played an important role in securing these benefits through the operation and re-setting of the price formula.

Post Office

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on industrial relations in the Post Office.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Industrial relations in the Post Office are a matter for the Post Office board and management.

34. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for introducing greater commercial freedom to the Post Office.

36. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to grant greater commercial freedom for the Post Office in the public sector.

Mr. Eggar: The Post Office operates several businesses.

We are actively engaged in widening the opportunities for Post Office Counters and are helping to automate their services.

We will announce any plans to change the present arrangements governing the remainder of Post Office activities as appropriate.

35. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future of the post and parcel delivery services.

Mr. Eggar: The Government are committed to maintaining a nationwide letter and parcel service, with daily delivery to every address in the country at a uniform and affordable structure of prices.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received during the current Session about the provision of counter services in post offices throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade regularly receives representations on a wide range of matters relating to the Post Office, including the provision of counter services.

Volvo Factory (Workington)

28. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress his Department has made in finding an occupant for the Volvo factory in Workington.

Mr. Eggar: Primary responsibility for finding a new occupant for the factory falls to the company and its agents. However, the local development organisations, together with Inward, the regional development organisation, and the Government office for the north-west are fully aware of the opportunities the site has to offer. They continue to promote the site at every suitable opportunity.

British Coal Enterprise

29. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for British Coal Enterprise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government and British Coal are continuing to consider options for the full range of services provided by British Coal Enterprise. No final decisions have been taken about its future.

British Coal (Privatisation)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss privatisation.

Mr. Eggar: I meet the chairman regularly to discuss a range of issues. The privatisation of British Coal's mining activities was successfully completed at the end of last year.

Gas Industry (Regulation)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he is next meeting the director general of Ofgas to discuss the regulation of the gas industry.

Mr. Eggar: I frequently meet the Director General of Gas Supply to discuss the regulatory framework of the gas industry, and in particular the Government's plans for legislation this session to increase competition in the industry.

Manufacturing Industry

Sir David Knox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the President of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry.

Mr. Heseltine: I, and other DTI Ministers, regularly meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry. The latest CBI monthly trends inquiry reported that manufacturers' order books were at their highest level since January 1989 and that the recent strong growth in manufacturing output was expected to continue.

Capital Equipment (Exports)

Mr. Waller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will indicate the current trend in the level of exports of capital equipment.

Mr. Needham: United Kingdom exports of capital equipment continue to increase strongly: in the third quarter of 1994, their volume was 17 per cent. higher than a year earlier.

House of Fraser Takeover

37. **Mr. Madden:** To aks the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received asking him to withdraw or modify the inspector's report into the House of Fraser takeover.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Since publication of the House of Fraser report in March 1990, no such representations have been received by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Inward Investment (North-West)

38. **Mr. Brandreth:** To aks the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to further encourage inward investment in the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government are fully aware of the benefits to the United Kingdom of inward investment and takes great pains to promote this country overseas. However, the choice of the precise location within the UK is entirely a matter for the commercial judgment of the investor.

British Telecom

39. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what telecommunications services BT is able and willing to provide but is prevented from doing so by the regulatory regime.

Mr. Ian Taylor: BT can offer any telecommunications service to non-residential customers and any non-broadcast services to residential customers. Broadcast entertainment services can only be provided by the holder of the relevant local franchise. BT has the same opportunities as other companies to obtain these local franchises, and the Command Paper on Broadband Communications published last November encouraged BT to apply for new franchises when these are advertised by the Independent Television Commission. If successful, BT could use its existing infrastructure for all services within the franchise area.

Utilities (Charges)

40. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his powers in relation to promoting competition, controlling profits and dividends and ensuring fair charges in those utilities in respect of business in private ownership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The duties and powers of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade are set down in the relevant legislation. The Government have established independent regulators for the utilities, with duties to promote competition and to protect the interests of consumers, including in respect of prices charged.

EU Regional Policy

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet his EU counterparts to discuss EU regional policy.

Mr. Charles Wardle: One of my hon. Friends will attend the informal meeting of regional policy and planning Ministers in Strasbourg on 30–31 March.

New Business (Leicestershire)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the recent creation of new business in Leicestershire.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In 1992 and 1993, the latest available figures, approximately 3,000 new businesses were created in Leicestershire each year, based on VAT registrations.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the value of imports and exports of motor vehicle components in 1992, 1993 and this year to date, together with his estimate of the import content of cars produced or assembled in the United Kingdom in 1973 and 1993.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the written answer that I gave him on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *510-11*. Figures for world trade for 1992 are published in "Business Monitor" MA 20. For 1993 and for 1994 to date, figures for extra-EC trade are published in "Business Monitor" MM 20 whereas figures for intra-EC trade are published in "Business Monitor" MQ 20.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the change in the deficit on trade with the EEC in (i) cars and (ii) commercial vehicles in 1992, 1993 and 1994 to date and the contribution that it has made to growth.

Mr. Needham: No assessment is made of contribution to growth. The crude trade balances were as follows:

Crude Trade Balance

£ Million

Year	*Cars*	*Commercial Vehicles*
1991	–1,089.0	218.2
1992	–1,693.3	202.3
1993	–3,309.6	33.7
1993 (January–September)	–2,625.0	70.9
1994 (January–September)	–3,487.7	–458.6

Non-Metallic Machinery and Equipment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer to a supplementary question on 23 November 1994, *Official Report*, column 583, if he will list the periods since 1964 in which output of other non-metallic machinery and equipment remained 10 per cent. below its previous peak for five years or more.

Mr. Needham: No. There is no readily available data on non-metallic machinery and equipment.

Foreign Firms (Public Money)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 23 November 1994, *Official Report*, column 583, how much public money in current prices was given to foreign firms to establish or increase output in the United Kingdom since 1973.

Mr. Needham: This question goes wider than my Department's responsibility and the information requested is not collated.

Manufacturing Trade

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will show the change in exports of finished manufactures in the latest three months to the EEC and to the rest of the world compared with 1992;

(2) what is his estimate of the increase in relative unit values for United Kingdom exports of manufacturers to EEC and non–EEC countries since the third quarter of 1992;

(3) what was the volume of imports and exports of finished manufactures from and to *(a)* the EEC and *(b)* non–EEC countries in the three months to August 1994;

(4) what is his estimate of the increase in relative unit values for United Kingdom exports of manufactures to European Economic Community and non–European Economic Community countries since the third quarter of 1992.

Mr. Needham: The information can be obtained from the Central Statistical Office's central shared database, access to which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will show the balance of trade in manufactures as a percentage of GDP in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1977, *(c)* 1979 and *(d)* 1993, together with the corresponding change since the second half of 1973 in (i) the terms of trade finished manufactures and (ii) relative unit values for exports of manufactures.

Mr. Needham: The balance of trade in manufactures was *(a)* 6 per cent. of GDP in 1970, *(b)* 5 per cent. in 1977, *(c)* 2 per cent. in 1979 and *(d)* minus 1 per cent.—a trade deficit—in 1993.

From 1973 to 1993, the terms of trade index for finished manufactures increased by 45 per cent. Relative unit values for exports are not available on a consistent basis prior to 1975. However, the latest data available show that, from 1975 to the third quarter of 1993, (i) the terms of trade index for finished manufactures increased by 29 per cent. and (ii) the relative unit value for exports of manufactures increased by 10 per cent.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the change between the latest quarter for which figures are available and the corresponding quarter of 1992 in the volume of exports and manufactures in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* the United States of America, *(c)* France, *(d)* Italy, *(e)* Spain, *(f)* the Netherlands and *(g)* the United Kingdom in relation to (i) EEC and (ii) non-EEC countries.

Mr. Needham: The information relating to the UK is regularly published by the Central Statistical Office in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Corresponding figures for Germany, the United States of America, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands is not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the average United Kingdom share of the volume of exports of manufactures by the main manufacturing countries since 1986; and what was the average from 1970 to 1977.

Mr. Needham: The average of the UK's share by volume of Main Manufacturing Countries' exports of manufactures for 1986 to 1991, the latest year for which data are available, was 8.2 per cent.; the corresponding figure for 1970 to 1977 was 9.9 per cent.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what effect the increase in United Kingdom relative import and export values since February 1993 has had on the volume of imports of finished manufactures since 1992.

Mr. Needham: Information on relative import unit values is not available, so the effect cannot be assessed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the relative profitability of the import-competing and export industries and other manufacturing industries since 1977.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer given to him on 20 December, *Official Report*, columns *1034–35*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will show the average annual increase in manufacturing productivity in the 21 years since 1973 in the United Kingdom and each EEC country.

Mr. Needham: The information, where available, is given in the table. Comparable information for other EU countries could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Annual average increase in manufacturing labour productivity [1] 1973—1993	*per cent. per annum*
France	2.1
Germany	1.7
Italy	2.3
United Kingdom	3.0
Nederlands	3.2
Ireland	6.3
Greece	1.2

Note:
[1] Manufacturing production dividend by manufacturing employment.
Source:
OECD Main Economic Indicators
Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the change in imports of finished manufactures from the EEC in June to August 1994 compared with 1992 and the corresponding change in the terms of trade for trade with the EEC in finished manufactures.

Mr. Needham: The information can be obtained from the Central Statistical Office's central shared database, access to which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which years since 1970 the United Kingdom share of exports by the main manufacturing countries, by value, has been lower than in 1992; and if he will provide corresponding figures by volume.

Mr. Needham: During the 23 years since 1970 the United Kingdom share by value of exports by the main manufacturing countries has been lower than in 1992 in the years 1974, 1986 and 1993. Comparable figures by volume are not readily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Computers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of imports and exports of computers in 1993, together with his estimate of the value added in the United Kingdom to the total value of the computers exported.

Mr Needham: Information on imports and exports of computers is regularly published in Business Monitors MM20 and MQ20, "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United kingdom", copies which are available in the Library of the House. Information is not available on the value added in the United Kingdom to the total value of computers exported.

Biological and Chemical Warfare

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the changes to controlled items for export introduced since 1984 as a result of concerns about biological and chemical weapons and materials; which items were listed; and under what statutory authority.

Mr. Heseltine: A chronological list of the items controlled and relevant changes since 1984 could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Items currently controlled because of concerns about chemical and biological weapons proliferation include any chemical warfare agent or biological agent which has been adapted for use in war, certain specific chemical precursors, biological agents, toxins, vaccines and certain chemical and biological dual-use equipment. These are listed under headings ML7, 1C350-354, 1C992 and 2B350-352 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994. In addition, under *schedule 1 part II of the order*, any other goods are subject to control if the exporter knows or suspects they are intended or likely to be used for CBW purposes.

The order, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House, was made under the statutory authority of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939 as amended by the Import and Export Control Act 1990.

Arms Exports (Iraq)

Mr. Cousins: To aks the President of the board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report,* column *653,* if the export of Cymbeline artillery locating radar to Iraq complied with stated export guidelines and UN arms embargoes.

Mr. Heseltine: As my earlier answer stated, all current export licences for Cymbeline radar were withdrawn by, and returned to, my department when UN sanctions on Iraq were imposed in August 1990. Whether the export of Cymbeline to Iraq complied with stated export guidelines is a matter subject to Sir Richard Scott's inquiry.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what locus the World Trade Organisation will have in respect of competition policy; what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on this; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The WTO has been given no locus in respect of competition policy. Suggestions have been made about the possibility of negotiating multilateral rules in this area, but discussions on this are still at a very preliminary stage.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Hawksley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make statement about the outcome of the meeting of the Internal Market Council held in Brussels on 8 December 1994.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I attended the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 8 December.

The Council adopted a directive amending for the thirteenth time directive 76/79/EEC on the marketing and use of dangerous substances. Germany, Denmark and Netherlands voted against.

In the Internal Market Council, an agreement was reached as "A" point on a directive on food additives other than colours and sweeteners and a common position on a proposed directive on the burning behaviour of material used in interior construction of certain categories of motor vehicles.

The Council debated the functioning of the Single Market; the take up of single market rules by central and eastern European countries; deregulation; the information society; ratification of the community patent agreement; measuring instruments; and the local dimension of the single market. The Council also discussed proposals for a system of notification of national measures derogating from the principle of free circulation of goods; transparency and efficiency of cross border payments; fees for European Medicines Evaluation Agency; and new foods and food ingredients.

The next meeting of the Council is planned for 6 June 1995.

Coal Industry (Safety)

Mr. Alison: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Coal Authority and the Health and Safety Executive have reached an agreement on safety matters as required by the Coal Industry Act 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Yes. I have today laid a copy of the "Memorandum of Agreement" before both Houses of Parliament, pursuant to section 4(2) of the Coal Industry Act 1994.

Nuclear Review

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultants he has commissioned in connection with the nuclear review; what are their terms of reference; when they were appointed; and when he expects their final report.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* Three firms of consultants have been appointed in connection with the nuclear review: BZW to examine issues related to the feasibility of privatisation and the introduction of private finance into the nuclear industry; KPMG to examine liabilities management issues; and NERA to examine diversity issues. Full details of the terms of reference have been placed in the Library of the House. BZW and KPMG were appointed in August 1994 and NERA in September 1994. I expect to have received final reports from all three consultants shortly.

DEFENCE

Farnborough Airfield

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of Farnborough airfield; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Farnborough airfield will become surplus to MOD requirements from 1 April 1995. However, arrangements have been put in place to make it available for the international air show at least until the end of the century. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport indicated on 20 December 1994, *Official Report,* column *1091–92* the Government believe it important to retain capacity for business aviation at Farnborough. The MOD has recently appointed Schroders to advise on the options for the longer term future of the Farnborough site, in particular its viability as a centre for business aviation and for the air show. Schroders will report in the spring of this year.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total amount of national lottery proceeds which has actually been disbursed to *(a)* charities, *(b)* sports organisations and *(c)* arts organisations as at 6 January 1995.

Mr. Dorrell: Of the £96 million currently in the national lottery distribution fund, over £19 million is available to each of the five sectors which will benefit from the national lottery, including the arts, sport and charitable sectors. Applications for grants are now being invited by the Arts and Sports Councils and the National Lottery Charities Board will invite applications later in the year. The Arts and Sports Councils expect to make their first grant payments in the spring.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total sum of national lottery entry proceeds which, as at 6 January 1995, had been retained by Camelot.

Mr. Dorrell: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked Peter Davis, the Director-General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Olive Oil and Durum Wheat

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps were taken after 1974 to introduce more effective and economical support arrangements for *(a)* olive oil and *(b)* durum wheat; and how much was spent directly and indirectly on support in each case in (i) 1974 and (ii) the latest year for which figures are available together with figures for EEC production, imports, exports and consumption.

Mr. Jack: The information is as follows.

(a) Olive oil:

1. In order to ensure more effective control, requirements were introduced in 1975 to establish a register of olive groves and in 1984 to set up control agencies. A maximum guaranteed quality (MGQ) was introduced in 1987 so that the rate of aid is reduced proportionately if production of olive oil exceeds the MGQ. The regime is due for reform in the near future.
2. The total net cost of the regime to the EC budget in 1974, with two producing member states, was 135.8 million units of account, £69 million using a conversion rate of 1.9615 units of account = £1, and the cost for 1994, with five producing member states, is estimated at 1819 mecu, £1,405 million using a conversion rate of 1.2945 ecu = £1.
3. The table shows estimated production, consumption, imports and exports of olive oil in the EC.

	1974 *(000 tonnes)*	*1992–93 Marketing year (November-October (000 tonnes)*
Production	[1]477.0	[2]1,379
Imports	[1]216.5	[2]57
Exports	[1]19.4	[2]146
Consumption[3]	674.1	1,290

[1] Source: Food and Agriculture Organisation. Figures for EC9
[2] Source: European Commission figures. Figures for EC12
[3] Consumption=production+imports-exports (i.e excluding stock changes)

b) Durum wheat:

4. During the late 1980s EC policies were adopted moving the emphasis away from price support in the form of intervention, export refunds and import levies towards payments in the form of an area-based production aid, restricted to producers in 'traditional' durum growing areas. The 1992 CAP reform measures continued these changes through the introduction of a single set of institutional prices for all cereals set at the lower common wheat level, and a phased three year cut in those prices to be compensated for by producer payments under the arable area payments schemes. Because the introduction of single institutional price level meant a bigger drop in support for durum than for other cereals certain durum growers continue to receive a special production aid.
5. The total cost of durum wheat support to the EC budget in 1974 was 82 units of account (£42 million at a conversion rate of £1=1.9615 units of account) and the provisional cost for 1994 is 568 mecu (£ 439 million at conversion rate of £1= 1.2945ecu). These figures exclude intervention support costs (including export refunds) in 1974 and Arable area payments in 1994, neither of which are separately identifiable from the total cereals expenditure.
6. The figures for EU production, imports, exports and consumption are as follows:

Durum wheat	*1974–75 (July–June)[1] ('000 tonnes)*	*1993–94 (July–June)[2] ('000 tonnes)*
Production	3,388	7,034
Imports	1,498	183
Exports	320	2,297
Total domestic usage	4,111	6,328

[1] Eurostat Supply Balance Sheet covering nine member states.
[2] Commission balance sheet 23 June 1994 covering 12 member states.

Dairy Products

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to paragraph 9 of Cmnd. 6003—"Membership of the European Community-Report on Renegotiation"—what steps have been taken to relate the price of dairy products to the need of efficient producers; and if he will publish (i) the average or representative price paid per gallon in the

market place for milk production quotas each year since quotas were introduced, (ii) the current price and (iii) the average production of milk per cow.

Mr. Jack: The Government have consistently pressed for reductions in CAP support prices for dairy products. Since 1988 the intervention prices for butter and skimmed milk powder have been reduced by 13 per cent. and 2 per cent. respectively.

The Department does not collect information on milk quota prices. That information may be obtained from the agricultural trade press and quota agents.

The average annual milk yield per cow in the United Kingdom since quotas were introduced is as follows:

Year	*Production Litres*
1984	4,748
1985	4,881
1986	4,974
1987	4,896
1988	4,975
1989	4,996
1990	5,160
1991	5,139
1992	5,251
1993 (provisional)	5,034

Source:

Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993.

Environmental Damage

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates his Department has made of the environmental damage caused in each of the three counties of Yorkshire and for Humberside through *(a)* over-grazing and *(b)* other practices involving livestock for which premiums are being paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: No overall estimate has been made of environmental damage caused by such practices in the counties specified but the Ministry's north-eastern regional service centre has under review 10 sites in North Yorkshire and two in West Yorkshire. None is currently under review in South Yorkshire or Humberside. Our objective is to secure necessary changes in farming practices by agreement with the graziers concerned who will be given every opportunity to bring about improvements before sanctions are applied. Premiums will be withheld only as a last resort.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the net cost to the United Kingdom balance of payments and the retail prices index of adopting the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Jack: Given the large number of assumptions which would have to be made as to what the balance of payments and the RPI would have been in the absence of the common agricultural policy, it is not possible to answer such a hypothetical question.

EDUCATION

Reading Recovery Schemes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she intends to take to ensure the long-term financial future of the national co-ordinating mechanism for reading recovery schemes.

Mr. Robin Squire: The institute of education, university of London has been funded to provide advice and support to local education authorities during the final two years of the national pilot of reading recovery. My right hon. Friend has no plans to fund the institute beyond the end of the pilot programme.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many grant-maintained schools have had their funding reduced as a result of overstated claims for pupils taking school meals; and if she will provide a list of the schools and, in each case, the adjustment made to their budget.

Mr. Robin Squire: The determination of grant for GM schools is now a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the agency to write to the hon. Member.

Teachers

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the total number of teachers in 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table below shows the full-time equivalent number of teachers in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector, including self-governing schools, in England as at January of each year.

	1993[1]	*1994*[2]
Nursery, primary and secondary	389,091 (396,332)	390,430
Special	16,647	16,292
Education other than at school	2,578	2,578
Total	408,316 (415,557)	409,300

[1] The bracketed figures for 1993 include teachers in sixth form colleges.

[2] As from April 1993 sixth form colleges became part of the further education sector, therefore the 1994 figures exclude teachers in these colleges.

Schools (Access)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the likely effect of parental choice on the speed at which schools become accessible to disabled children.

Mr. Forth: Parental preference will be one of the factors that will influence the speed at which the trend continues towards more pupils with special needs being educated in mainstream schools. It is for local education authorities and the Funding Agency for Schools to secure sufficient places for pupils with special needs in the light of demand. However, parents take differing views on the

suitability of schools and it is not possible to predict the future effect with any accuracy.

School Construction

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* new schools are planned for construction within the next 10 years and *(b)* existing schools plan the construction of major extensions within the next 10 years, by education authority area.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education with whom she is consulting in the drawing up of upgraded constructional standards, referred to in her answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *218*; and when schools will be subject to those upgraded constructional standards.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department will be consulting shortly with local education authorities, disability organisations and other interested parties. We currently envisage that the revised standards will apply to new construction at schools from September 1995.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Subsidiarity

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many draft directives have been rejected on the grounds that they violate the principle of subsidiarity set out in the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. David Davis: Eleven proposals for legislation have been withdrawn since 1993 on subsidiarity grounds. A number of others have been amended. It is impossible to quantify the number of proposals which are not coming forward at all because they have been ruled out on subsidiarity grounds—but this is perhaps the most significant consequence of the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity at Maastricht.

Management Information Systems

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the reasons for delaying the introduction of a full management information system for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office until April 1996; and if he will ensure that speedier progress is made.

Mr. Baldry: For operational reasons, the FCO's financial management and accounting system can only be introduced at the start of a financial year. The complex project to procure, configure, test and implement the system began in February 1994. Completing it by April 1995 carried unacceptable risks. April 1996 remains the target.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the financial management accounting system to be introduced in 1996 will be based on the MINIS-type model operated by home civil service departments.

Mr. Baldry: The FCO's financial and management accounting system is a fully integrated accounting system which will enable more precise costing of support and frontline functions and the targeting of funding to activities and objectives. It is therefore not based on the MINIS-type model but, as it includes a planning and budgetary module and as it will support the introduction of resource accounting, it will be capable of producing similar information.

Turkey

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what time was spent by Her Majesty's ambassador in Ankara on bilateral/lateral relations, assisting British exports, aid to British citizens, United Kingdom immigration, aid and domestic policies, in the last financial year.

Mr. David Davis: Her Majesty's ambassador in Ankara in the last financial year spent approximately 15 per cent. of his time on bilateral affairs, 30 per cent. on promoting British exports, 20 per cent. on following domestic Turkish politics, 20 per cent. on Turkish external policy, three per cent. on consular affairs, two per cent. on immigration work and ten per cent. on management of the embassy. The breakdown of time spent for the rest of the embassy is of course different. He has minimal personal involvement in the small amount of aid activity in Turkey.

Sudan

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about bilateral relations with Sudan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As was announced at the FCO news conference earlier today, a new ambassador will arrive in the Republic of Sudan in March to take up his appointment following the official retirement date of the preceding ambassador, who was expelled at the end of 1993. Our bilateral concerns about the civil war, human rights, and the distribution of humanitarian relief supplies, can be better pursued with the Sudanese Government if we have an ambassador in Khartoum.

Lebanon

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of arms sales to Lebanon.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are willing to consider applications for the sale of arms to the Lebanese Government. All applications for the sale of arms will be considered on a case by case basis in the light of the international guidelines to which we are committed. These include whether a proposed transfer would be likely to increase tension in the region or contribute to regional instability. Applications by individuals will be considered for arms for sporting or leisure use only.

SCOTLAND

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Lang: Electronic mail is now part of my Department's internal communication system and links with other Government Departments will shortly become operational. I have no plans at present to use it for other external communications, but my Department is keeping the matter under review.

Correspondence

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South may expect a reply from the chief executive of the Western General Hospitals NHS trust to his letters of 4 October 1994 and 9 November 1994 requesting information about the start-up grant awarded to the trust by the national health service management executive and for an indication as to how this money was spent;

(2) when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South may expect a reply from the chief executive of the Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust to his letters of 4 October 1994 and 9 November 1994 requesting information about the start-up grant awarded to the trust by the national health service management executive and for an indication as to how this money was spent.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Member should have received replies from both these NHS trusts as letters were sent by them on 25 November and 22 December 1994 respectively. Both have apologised for the delay.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take in response to recommendation 1235 (1994) of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe relating to psychiatry and human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on psychiatry and human rights has yet to be adopted formally by the Council.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding the policy of each health board in Scotland with regard to the provision of infertility treatment for patients in the respective health board area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: It is for individual health boards to decide on the pattern and extent of infertility services they wish to purchase, in the light of their assessment of local needs.

I understand that all health boards in Scotland purchase levels I and II infertility services.

Level III services are available at four centres in Scotland. These are located in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow and are based on, or have links with, the university medical departments of obsterics and gynaecology. Most health boards purchase specialist level III treatment, including in vitro fertilisation. I understand that the exceptions are Grampian, Lothian, Orkney and Shetland health boards. These boards are currently reviewing their arrangements for purchasing infertility services.

Hospitals (Children)

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by health board all hospitals with children's wards giving *(a)* the total number of beds, *(b)* the total number and percentage of beds available for overnight parental accommodation and *(c)* the average annual number of overnight stays by parents.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[Holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Information on beds in children's wards in all hospitals in Scotland is shown in the table. Information on overnight stays by parents is not held centrally.

National health service hospitals in Scotland average available staffed beds in children's wards[1]: by health board area of treatment and hospital year ending 30 September 1994

	Beds
SCOTLAND	858
Argyll and Clyde	*30*
Inverclyde Royal hospital	12
Royal Alexandra hospital	18
Ayrshire and Arran	*37*
Crosshouse hospital	20
The Ayr hospital	17
Borders	*13*
Borders general hospital	13
Dumfries and Galloway	*17*
Dumfries and Galloway Royal infirmary	17
Fife	*29*
Victoria hospital, Kirkcaldy	29
Forth Valley	*19*
Falkirk and district Royal infirmary	9
Stirling Royal infirmary	10
Grampian	*121*
Royal Aberdeen children's hospital	121
Greater Glasgow	*283*
RHSC, Glasgow	283
Highland	*33*
Raigmore hospital	33
Lanarkshire	*[2]46*
Law hospital	22
Monklands district general hospital	23
Lothian	*167*
RHSC, Edinburgh	150
St. John's hospital at Howden	17
Tayside	*63*
Ninewells hospital	46
Perth Royal infirmary	12
Stracathro hospital	4

[1] Comprises all beds in children's hospitals (Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital, RHSC Glasgow and RHSC Edinburgh) and paediatric surgery and paediatric medicine beds in all other hospitals in Scotland. Not shown are those hospitals which recorded less than 0.5 average available staffed beds.

[2] Health board totals may not compute with individual hospital figures due to the effects of rounding.

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by health board all children's hospitals giving *(a)* the total number of beds, *(b)* the total number and percentage of beds available for overnight parental accommodation and *(c)* the average annual number of overnight stays by parents.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Information on beds in children's hospitals is shown in the table. Information on overnight stays by parents is not held centrally.

National health service hospitals in Scotland average available staffed beds in children's hospitals: by health board area of treatment and hospital year ending 30 September 1994

Scotland	*554*
Grampian, Royal Aberdeen children's hospital	121
Greater Glasgow, RHSC, Glasgow	283
Lothian, RHSC, Edinburgh	150

GP Fundholders

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner practices had become fundholders at the end of 1994 in each health board area in Scotland; what percentage of total practices this represents; and what plans he has in respect of practices which have decided not to opt for fundholding status.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Health board	*Operational fundholders*	*Percentage of total practices*
Argyll and Clyde	5	4.6
Ayrshire and Arran	4	6.0
Borders	2	8.3
Dumfries and Galloway	1	2.7
Fife	4	6.5
Forth Valley	4	7.1
Grampian	31	33.3
Greater Glasgow	11	4.8
Highland	3	3.9
Lanarkshire	15	16.3
Lothian	18	12.7
Orkney	0	0
Shetland	0	0
Tayside	9	10.6
Western Isles	0	0
Total	107	9.6

The GP fundholding scheme is a voluntary scheme which is currently open to practices with 6,000 or more patients or which can group together to achieve this figure.

Under proposals announced on 25 November by my noble Friend the Minister of State it is intended to expand and develop the GP fundholding scheme to allow GP practices a range of options, to participate directly in purchasing health services for the benefit of their patients. This will be subject to parliamentary approval for amendments to the regulations. It will include an expanded standard fundholding scheme from 1 April 1996, including a reduction in the minimum list size requirement to 4,000 patients, and a new primary care purchasing initiative which, subject to successful piloting, it is hoped can be made available to all GP practices in Scotland irrespective of list size. Interest is also being canvassed, amongst experienced GP fundholding practices in Scotland, to participate in up to six pilot projects to evaluate the possible benefits of fundholding practices having the option of purchasing all hospital and community health services on behalf of their patients.

These new arrangements are intended to facilitate the process whereby GP practices enter the fundholding scheme in a more flexible way. The resultant participation by increased numbers of practices will assist health boards to ensure that their purchasing of health services for patients is led by primary care priorities. Health boards also have the responsibility to make effective arrangements for consultation with all their GP practices about their purchasing plans, and such arrangements will include also inputs from GP practices which are not directly involved in the fundholding scheme.

Emergency Services

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what system of communications with emergency vehicles the police force, ambulance service and fire brigade have in each region of Scotland; what studies or discussions have been undertaken to make systems compatible with each other in each region; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* All Scottish police forces and fire brigades operate mobile radio systems to common technical standards and the two services occupy adjacent bands of radio spectrum managed by the Scottish Office directorate of telecommunications. These systems are estimated to provide coverage to more than 95 per cent. of all class A and B roads, in addition to urban areas. The ambulance service is currently in the process of re-engineering its mobile radio network to the same coverage standards, with a new system currently fully operational in Grampian and Highlands and Islands.

Operationally, all normal inter-service communication takes place via the control rooms of the services involved. However, a common inter-agency radio channel has been agreed between all three services for local use where circumstances indicate that this would be advantageous.

Publications (Cost)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of printing, publishing and distributing the publication, "Scotland—Getting Better".

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The cost of printing, publishing and distributing "Scotland–Getting Better" is £10,200.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of publications for each health board and health trust in Scotland for each year since 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Professional Medical Staff

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the turnover of professional medical staff in each health trust in 1994.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* Information on the turnover of medical staff is not held centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 January 1995

HEALTH

Primary Care

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence there is that providing better primary care reduces the need for secondary care in the health service.

Mr. Malone: Increasingly, services that used to be provided in hospital are being offered in GP surgeries for example physiotherapy, diabetes and asthma clinics and vasectomies. Relieving the burden on secondary care allows treatment of more serious conditions and reduces waiting lists. This represents real improvements for patients. A 1992 study comparing data from 11 industrialised nations including the United Kingdom found that a primary care led health system was associated with lower costs of care, higher satisfaction of the population with its health services, better health levels and lower medication use.

District Nurses

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements exist to ensure the health and safety of district nurses;

(2) what measures she has taken to protect district nurses from verbal and physical abuse at the hands of patients released under the care in the community scheme.

Mr. Sackville: The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 provides the legislative framework within which local employers and their staff agree arrangements to ensure the health and safety of all staff.

NHS League Tables

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to include patients' views in NHS league tables.

Mr. Malone: None.

Research Units

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the future of the research units funded by her Department and recently subject to expert peer review.

Mr. Malone: Site visits to all the units have been made and, with the agreement of the relevant directors, copies of the reports together with the conclusions of the site visit teams have been placed in the Library. One report is outstanding and will be placed in the Library shortly. The outcome of all visits is favourable and Department of Health funding will continue. The future of the units will be secured by agreeing a long-term programme for each and, at the same time, creating opportunities for all directors to tender competitively for additional research commissions.

Cook Report

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to be able to issue a substantive reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Don Valley—reference MR/KV—relating to the Cook report.

Mr. Sackville: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Cumberlege, replied yesterday.

Secure Units

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many secure unit places for young offenders were created in the last year.

Mr. Bowis: Secure accommodation is for all children looked after by local authorities, some of whom may be offenders or alleged offenders.

We announced on 22 April 1994 a new capital building programme to provide an additional 170 secure places.

Doctors' Pay

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the amount paid to general practitioners in the London borough of Newham in respect of the Jarman deprivation index based on the 1981 census returns for the year 1993–94 and the sums that would have been payable using the census returns for 1991; and what basis of payments she expects to be adopted for 1995–96.

Mr. Malone: The information on payments is not available below family health services authority level.

The basis of payments for 1995–96 will be decided after the Doctors and Dentists Review Body has made its recommendations for that year.

Census Returns (1991)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to rectify or supplement the census returns of 1991 to account for under-enumerations; and if she will consider further adjustment for areas where studies have suggested that further supplementation is required.

Mr. Sackville: Allowance for under-enumeration in the census has been made in the production of the Registrar Generals' mid-year population estimates. Details of the adjustments were published in Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Monitors PP1 93/1 and PP1 93/2, copies of which are available in the Library.

For other census outputs, the general practice adopted, as with previous censuses and as in other countries, has been to publish guidance on what is known about the level of undercoverage; users can then take this into account as is appropriate for their particular applications. The relevant information was first published more than two years ago; further details have been published since then but have been only marginal revisions of the overall amount. There was nothing exceptional about the overall coverage of the 1991 census—the published tables relate to 98 per cent. of the population, similar to 1981. This is up to the best international standards.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authority Rents

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average local authority rent in 1978–79; what it is today; what has been the increase in real terms; and what was the corresponding change in the retail price index.

Mr. Curry: The average weekly local authority rent in England in 1978–279 was £5.90 and in 1994–95 it is provisionally estimated to be £35.68. After adjusting for inflation using the gross domestic product deflator, these figures represent an increase of 107 per cent. in real terms. The GDP deflator shows inflation of 192 per cent. over the period and the retail price index an increase of 183 per cent.

Local Authority Leaseholds

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to introduce measures to assist local authority leaseholders who are encountering difficulty in selling their homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I hope, in the spring, to introduce a more flexible form of agreement which local authorities can use to assist in the open market sale of flats by indemnifying mortgage lending to new purchasers. We are looking at a scheme to help local authorities take back certain flats, which are affected by mortgageability problems, in exchange for selling leaseholders another home more suitable for their needs.

Housing Association Rents

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage increase in rents for new housing association assured tenancies between 1989 and 1994; and what was the change in the retail prices index over the same period.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Under-Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), gave the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Mrs Prentice) on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *724-25*.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for a second round of bidding for the single regeneration budget, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: As I announced in a parliamentary reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) on 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *9-10*, a second bidding round of the single regeneration budget will be launched later this year. Some £240 million will initially be available for round two, with £40 million of this available in 1996–97 for early funding of approved bids. As with round one, we shall expect good quality, deliverable bids which effectively address local needs.

Wildlife and Conservation Seminar

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment that major conservation societies were invited to the wildlife and conservation seminar held by the Crown Estates, English Nature and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation.

Mr. Atkins: There has been no such seminar. Copies of the notes of informal discussions among these three bodies have been sent to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the British Trust for Ornithology.

Nature Conservation Societies

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if nature conservation societies will be allowed to apply for sporting leases on tidal land.

Mr. Atkins: Yes, applications should continue to be made to the Crown Estate.

Shooting Leases

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has carried out in relation to allocation of shooting leases and areas of particular nature conservation importance.

Mr. Atkins: None. Notification of such an area as a site of special scientific interest provides a mechanism for consultation with English Nature over shooting. Where the Crown Estate owns tidal land, the commissioners rely on advice from English Nature prior to granting leases, including sporting rights on the foreshore.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if nature conservation societies will be allowed to participate in drawing up draft procedures for considering the grant of shooting leases.

Mr. Atkins: The Crown Estate are about to begin consultations with a wide range of interested bodies over revised draft procedures drawn up with the help of English Nature. Within sites of special scientific interest, owners and occupiers should continue to consult English Nature.

Water Companies

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish his proposals for measures to replace water company byelaws in 1997.

Mr. Atkins: I have today published a consultation paper about the purpose, format, scope, and administration of measures to replace water byelaws. Copies have been placed in the House library.

For many years, water companies have made byelaws for the prevention of waste, misuse, undue consumption and contamination of water. Current byelaws expire in 1997, but there is no provision now for the companies to make new ones. I am therefore consulting a wide variety of interest groups and individuals on a range of replacement options.

The paper explores a number of possible options from a non-statutory code of practice to national regulations either as part of the building regulations, as separate water regulations or a combination of these two. It also considers whether water companies should continue to control the replacement provisions or whether the

responsibility should be transferred to local authorities, an independent agency or placed under joint control.

There are some difficult issues to be addressed, but above all the health and safety of consumers must be protected and water companies must be able to carry out their statutory duty to maintain an adequate supply of water which is fit for human consumption.

Disabled People

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment whether he will consult on amending the building regulations in England and Wales to help disabled people gain access to and within dwellings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am today issuing a consultation paper setting out the Government's proposals for amending the Building Regulations 1991 to make certain requirements in relation to the design and construction of new dwellings which will be of benefit to disabled people. Comments on these proposals are invited by 30 April 1995. It will be important to establish what measures will be of particular benefit to disabled people, and what the implications will be on housebuilding costs. A copy of the consultation paper has been placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Care Disregard

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many inquiries were made to the family credit helpline about the new child care disregard since its introduction in October.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not recorded. The family credit helpline service has 70 incoming lines, which operate a queuing system. The lines are open from 7.30 am to 6.30 pm, Monday to Friday. During the period in question, from 1 October to 16 December 1994, a total of 880,462 inquiries were received with regard to family credit in general. Helpline operators have direct access to the family credit computer system and answer queries regarding all aspects of the benefit from both current and potential claimants.

State Pension Scheme

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the average loss of benefit to those women who will lose some of their entitlement to state pension following the changes announced to the state pension scheme in the Gracious Speech;

(2) if he will give his estimate of the number of women who will lose some state pension entitlement following the changes to the state pension scheme announced in the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Estimated numbers of women affected by the proposed changes to the state pension scheme range from 100,000 in 2010 to:

1,900,000 in 2020
2,100,000 in 2030
1,600,000 in 2040
1,800,000 in 2050

Based on current rules of entitlement, it is estimated that, for those women reaching 60 in 2020, the average reduction in expected benefit would be around £50 per week—1994–95 rates—for the five years until they reach the new state pension age. This estimate takes account of reductions of expected state pension entitlement and offsetting increases from dependency increases, widow's benefit, incapacity benefit and income-related benefits.

Social Fund

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many social fund applications for *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans have been turned down in each local office in the Benefits Agency southern territory in each year since 1990–91;

(2) how many social fund applications for *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans were turned down even though the applicant fulfilled qualifying criteria due to local budgeting restriction in each local office in the Benefits Agency southern territory in each year since 1990–91.

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 13 December 1994 column 675-76]:* I am advised that Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, is writing again to clarify his reply of 13 December 1994. I am arranging for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library with the additional information.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. John Denham dated 11 January 1995:

I am writing to clarify the information provided to you in my letter of 13 December 1994 in response to your Parliamentary Question. You asked how many Social Fund grant and loan applications were refused, despite the applicant fulfilling qualifying criteria, due to local budgeting restrictions for each local office in the Benefits Agency Southern Territory in each year since 1990–91.

As previously explained, the new Social Fund Computer System records reasons for refusal for every item refused in an application, unlike its predecessor. The reason for changing the way in which refusals were recorded was to enable customers to receive a more detailed decision which gave reasons for refusal of individual items requested.

As a consequence, the figures for 1993–94 in Annex B (which show the number of refusals for individual items on the grounds of insufficient priority) are greater in some cases than those in Annex A (which show the number of applications refused in their entirety). This means that the figures for 1993–94 contained in the two Annexes are not directly comparable.

Finally, I apologise for the erroneous inclusion of South Cheshire In Annex B.

I hope this explains the position and I apologise for any confusion.

National Insurance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the savings from abolishing the national insurance ceiling and *(b)* the cost of abolishing the national insurance threshold in 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The information is in the table.

	Change in yield (£ Billion) (a)	(b)
1994–95	+2.7	+3.2
1995–96	–1.0	–1.1

Notes:
1. the reply at *(a)* assumes that the upper earnings limit would remain in place at current levels for the purpose of calculating contracted-out rebates.
2. the reply at *(b)* assumes that non contributions are paid by employed earners on the portion of earnings below the lower earnings limit.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computer Software

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the extend of loss of computer software expertise to the United States of America; what action he plans to minimise it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: There is no substantial evidence of overall net loss of software expertise from the United Kingdom to the United States of America. Of the 4,700 computing students graduating in the United Kingdom in 1992–93 only 80 entered employment overseas as a first destination. The Government's policy is to encourage improved international competitiveness so that United Kingdom companies can continue to attract the best software expertise available in the world.

Source of graduate information: Department of Employment "First Destination Survey"—Figures do not include the Welsh and Scottish polytechnic.

Stagecoach Bus Company

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what complaints have been made to the Office of Fair Trading as a result of operations by the Stagecoach bus company or any of its subsidiaries; what action has been taken in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Director General of Fair Trading has received a number of complaints about the activities of the Stagecoach bus company. As with all such complaints he receives, these have been carefully considered, and further inquiries made and action taken where appropriate.

Complaints against Stagecoach or its subsidiaries have led to further action in the cases listed:

Competition Act 1980

Southdown Motor Services Ltd: referred to Monopolies and Mergers Commission, behavioural undertakings given after MMC adverse finding, May 1994.

Fife Scottish Omnibuses Ltd: behavioural undertakings given May 1994.

Fair Trading Act 1973—monopoly provisions

Bus services in the north-east of England: referred to MMC November 1994. It will be for the MMC to determine whether a monopoly situation exists in favour of Stagecoach or other operators, and, if so, whether this has operated against the public interest. The MMC's report is due in May 1995.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The recently published Command Paper "Creating the Superhighways of the Future: Developing Broadband Communications in the UK" made clear the Government's commitment to being more proactive in offering public services using new communications technology. The DTI recognises the significant benefits afforded by electronic mail where these can improve the efficiency and quality of public services. Electronic mail facilities are already available to many with in the DTI, and are being progressively extended throughout the Department. I have an e-mail address on the Internet, which is "taylor @ mintech.deman.co.uk", as announced in the House on 15 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1249–50.*

This exchange is also being issued on Internet.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *299*, if the United Kingdom company that is licensed to explore for oil and gas in the East Timor gap requires an export licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1981.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* A licence is required under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended, to export from the United Kingdom goods identified in the schedules to the order, unless the goods are specified in article 3 *(b) to (e)* of the order.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *299* if the United Kingdom company that is licensed to explore for oil and gas in the East Timor gap has been granted an export licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1981.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* it has been the practice of successive governments not to reveal details of export licences or applications for licences unless the requirements of confidentiality are outweighed by the public interest.

Welsh Consumer Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Consumer Council concerning the filling of the vacancy for the post of director; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The appointment of director of the Welsh Consumer Council is a management matter for the Welsh and national consumer councils.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Space Science

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the expenditure of the Science and Engineering Research Council and Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council on space science over the past 10 years, distinguishing between the amount required for European Space Agency expenditure and that required

for domestic expenditure and giving the estimated outturn for the current year; and what other departments or research councils have provided additional funding for space science.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Expenditure by SERC on space science at 1994–95 prices was as follows:

	Total £ million	*of which ESA subscription £ million*
1984–85	21.9	19.0
1985–86	25.7	22.8
1986–87	29.7	24.3
1987–88	33.4	29.2
1988–89	39.2	33.4
1989–90	40.0	33.9
1990–91	36.3	29.1
1991–92	37.0	27.2
1992–93	41.1	29.9
1993–94	40.2	29.9

As part of the research council reorganisation at 1 April 1994, responsibility for this expenditure transferred to PPARC.

In 1994–95 PPARC expect to spend £46.5 million on space science, of which £36.4 million relates to the ESA subscription.

The Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of the Environment, the Ministry of Defence, the Meteorological Office and the Natural Environment Research Council have also provided funding for space science.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Public Appointments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he takes into account political affiliation when making public appointments.

Mr. Dorrell: Account has sometimes been taken of party political affiliation when making appointments in my area of responsibility, as when the nominee of the Leader of the Opposition was appointed to the Millennium Commission. However, these and all other appointments are based on the ability of the individual concerned to perform the duties and responsibilities of the post for which he or she is being considered.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Budapest Summit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional financial, logistical, technical or other support is to be made available by the United Kingdom to the International Atomic Energy Agency in fulfilment of the commitment entered into by Her Majesty's Government's support of section VI, page 23 of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe Budapest summit declaration of 6 December.

Mr. Baldry: The IAEA has been working since 1993 on a package of measures designed to strengthen and streamline the agency's system of safeguards, in particular with a view to better detect clandestine nuclear weapons programmes. The United Kingdom will take a view on appropriate levels of financial, logistical, technical or other support in the light of the decisions taken by the IAEA board of governors, who are meeting to consider full proposals in March 1995.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government in 1994 to uphold the commitment made under section I of the principles governing non-proliferation at page 22 of the OSCE Budapest summit declaration of 6 December, in regard to the control of missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction and their components and technology.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom is an active member of the missile technology control regime which seeks to control exports of missiles, as well as components and technology, capable of delivering nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The United Kingdom continues to work closely with her MTCR partners to limit the proliferation of ballistic and cruise missiles in accordance with her commitments under the regime.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to ascertain whether the proposed extension of the 1958 Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matters, Cm. 2686, is compatible with the commitments entered into by Her Majesty's Government as a signatory to the OSCE Budapest summit declaration of 6 December, in regard to section VI, part 1, subsection 3 on the control of the transfer of missiles, their components and technology.

Mr. Baldry: We have no doubt that the 1958 United Kingdom United States agreement for co-operation in the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes is consistent with the commitments reaffirmed by the OSCE Budapest summit declaration.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what grounds of policy Her Majesty's Government supported the section under nuclear proliferation, at page 23 of the OSCE Budapest summit declaration of 6 December which calls for the indefinite and unconditional extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Baldry: We support indefinite and unconditional extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty because it provides the best possible framework for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, for negotiations on nuclear disarmament, and for the promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the United Kingdom's purchase of Trident missiles and their auxiliary technological support from the United States of America falls within the affirmation made by the participating states of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe under the principles governing non-proliferation, page 22 of the Budapest summit declaration of 6 December.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom's purchase of the Trident system does not conflict with the affirmation

made on page 22 of the Budapest summit declaration. Trident is committed to NATO and forms part of the stable security environment envisaged in the summit declaration.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the special negotiating session for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty held under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva in December; what proposals were put by Her Majesty's Government to the special session; and how they were received by other participating states.

Mr. Baldry: The ad hoc committee of the conference on disarmament made good progress on the verification regime of a comprehensive test ban treaty, reaching broad agreement on the main components of an international monitoring system and making technical preparations for developing the on-site inspection provisions. The organisational arrangements for administering the treaty were also considered. The United Kingdom delegation played a full and active part in the negotiations.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleages and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Exhibitions

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the standing conference on schools' science and technology to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 20 March to Friday 24 March 1995.

Mr. George: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Defence Police Federation to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 30 January to 3 February 1995.

Staff Statistics

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many people are accredited to work at the Palace of Westminster, in the categories *(a)* working for hon. Members *(b)* servants of the House and *(c)* others; how many in each category are women; how many in each category are full time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The latest Pass Office figures show that;

(a) 1,295 people, of whom 759 are female, work for hon. Members of this House

(b) There are 1,470 officers and staff of the House, of whom 616 are female.

(c) A total of 8,482 others are accredited to work at the Palace of Westminster and in the parliamentary outbuildings, of whom 1,787 are female.

The figures at *(c)* include Members of both Houses, officers and staff of the House of Lords, the staff of Peers and Lady Peers and any other individuals sponsored by the House of Lords.

I regret that the Pass Office records do not indicate whether passholders are employed full or part time.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ex-service men who were invalided from the services prior to 1973 were beneficiaries of the armed forces pension scheme as at 1 January in each year since 1989.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of making pension payments to beneficiaries of the armed forces pension scheme who were invalided from the services prior to 1973 on the same basis as those who were invalided from the services after 1973; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is a general rule of all public service pension schemes that improvements apply only to those serving from the date they are introduced, as the administrative task involved in arranging back payments would make it impossible to introduce such improvements.

Harrier Aircraft

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sorties were flown by Royal Air Force Harriers during the Air Warrior exercise in Nevada in August 1994; how many of these involved low-level flying; and where the work-up training of aircrews was conducted prior to deploying to Nevada.

Mr. Soames: RAF Harriers flew 199 sorties during Exercise Air Warrior 94; all of these would have included some element of low level flying. No specific work-up training was conducted prior to the exercise.

RAF Spadeadam

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the amounts paid by each foreign air force

for use made of the electronic warfare training facilities at RAF Spadeadam in each financial year since 1989–90.

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's practice to release details of Government-to-Government payments of this kind.

Slovakia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the status of the offer by the Slovak Government to host Royal Air Force low-flying training in Slovakia since the election of a new Government in that country.

Mr. Soames: We have received no indication that the status of the Slovak offer to host Royal Air Force low-flying training in Slovakia has been affected by the change of Government there.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use his Department has made of executive search agencies in filling vacancies within his Department and executive agencies administered by his Department during the last year; and how much these services have cost his Department.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* During the past year, my Department and its executive agencies have used executive search consultants on six occasions. The cost of this work has been some £190,000. Executive search consultants are used to identify and recruit staff to fill key posts in the Department which are either suitable for open competition or require skills and experience which are not available within the public service. In addition, some £80,000 was spent on advertising the posts nationally and on the legitimate expenses of candidates called for interview.

SCOTLAND

Forth Rail Bridge

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his investigations into the rust on the Forth rail bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The inquiries which I discussed with the hon. Member last month are well advanced but not quite complete. I shall write to the hon. Member once I have the conclusions and have had an opportunity to consider them.

Staffing

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average qualified nurse to patient ratio in each of the last five years by region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 9 December 1994]:* A nurse to patient ratio is shown in the table and incorporates all patient types. It is not an absolute measure but gives an indication of trends. It does not take account of the changes over time of the intensity of nursing activity per patient as hospital stays have shortened.

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Number of Nurses (WTE)[1]	29,416	29,478	29,732	29,715	29,536
In-patient Discharges (000)	896	912	920	942	952
Total Number of Patients all Types[2] (000)	7,669	7,786	7,891	8,059	8,210
Average Daily Number of Patients (weighted)[3]	48,632	47,554	46,010	44,819	42,869
Nurse Patient Ratio[4]	0.60	0.62	0.65	0.66	0.69

Notes:
[1] The number of nurses are derived from the annual census at 30 September.
[2] Includes in-patient discharges, out-patient and day patient attendances, and day cases.
[3] The average number of patients is derived by weighting the patient counts for the year by average relative costs as derived from the Scottish health service costs publications. The downward trend is mainly a reflection of reduced lengths of stay of in-patients. The intensity of nursing care will, however be increased on average over these shorter stays.
[4] The ratio of nurses to the average daily number of patients.

TREASURY

Anti-avoidance Rules

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he made when introducing his new anti-avoidance rules affecting financial assets held by associates of banks, of the effect on registered housing associations borrowing from the private finance markets; and what plans he has to amend the Finance Bill to exclude them from these provisions.

Sir George Young: The proposal in question affects the tax treatment of certain financing transactions between banking groups and a range of different borrowers including, as it appears, a number of housing associations. It applies to the lender rather than the borrower in these transactions, and does so without reference to the characteristics of the borrower. It will impinge on housing associations, like other borrowers, only if they have chosen to indemnify their lenders against the effects of future tax changes. My right hon. and learned Friend sees no basis in these circumstances for excluding lending to housing associations from the scope of his proposal; he will, however, be considering representations that a degree of transitional protection should be extended to lending already made to them.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of increases in *(a)* petrol duty, *(b)* milk and *(c)* mortgage interest payments on the retail prices index.

Mr. Nelson: The increases in petrol duty will contribute an increase of around 0.16 percentage points in December 1994, and a further increase of around 0.06

percentage points in January 1995, to the change in the all-items retail prices index.

The milk index rose by 3.6 per cent. in November, contributing around 0.04 percentage points to the change in the all-items RPI.

So far, few mortgage lenders have passed the recent 0.5 per cent. increase in base rates on to their borrowers and so the impact on the all items RPI has been negligible.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the effect of each 0.5 per cent. increase in mortgage interest rates on the retail prices index.

Mr. Nelson: An increase in mortgage interest rates of 0.5 percentage points would have the effect of adding around 0.31 percentage points to the change in the all-items RPI.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show in rank order the percentage change in price since August 1992 of each of the non-food sub-group items of the retail prices index.

Mr. Nelson: The percentage change in price of each of non-food sub-group items of the retail prices index since August 1992 are shown in rank order in the table.

RPI Sub-group Items	*Percentage Change*
Tobacco	15.1
Catering	10.6
Leisure Service	9.4
Personal Goods and Services	7.8
Fares and Other Travel Costs	7.7
Alcoholic Drinks	6.6
Motoring Costs	6.5
Clothing and Footwear	6.3
Fuel and Light	4.7
Household Goods	3.4
Household Services	2.2
Leisure Goods	0.2
Housing	–1.0

Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the paper on prices read by the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England to the City of London branch of the Institute of Directors on 13 December 1992 represents Government policy.

Mr. Nelson: As the Deputy Governor stated in his speech on 13 December 1993, we must regain the attitudes and expectations of a non inflationary climate.

It is the task of monetary policy to produce such a climate. Since October 1992, the Government have had an explicit inflation objective. The aim is to keep inflation—as measured by the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments—in the range 1 to 4 per cent. and to bring it down to the lower half of the range by the end of the present Parliament. In November, underlying inflation was 2.3 per cent. and it has been lower than 3 per cent. for 14 months, the first time inflation has been this low for this long since 1961.

Interest Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the effect of the increase of interest rates this year on the rate of profitability of manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: No estimates of the effect of interest rates changes on the rate of profitability of UK manufacturing industry are available. Treasury forecast of profitability of UK industrial and commercial companies, as measured by the real rate of return of capital, are given in chapter 3 of the Treasury's "Financial Statement and Budget Report", 1995–96. The forecast shows a healthy rise in the real rate of return on capital in 1994, followed by some further increase in 1995.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the increase in interest rates on 7 December has had on real interest rates; and if he will publish a table showing the real interest in each year since 1994.

Mr. Nelson: Real interest rates can be calculated in several ways, using either short or longer term nominal interest rates, and either past or expected future rates of inflation.

Data on interest rates and inflation are published in the CSO publications "Financial Statistics", table 7.10, and "Economic Trends", table 3.1. Data on expected future inflation rates are published in the Treasury's monthly review of independent forecasters, and the Bank of England's inflation report.

Treasury Forecasts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecasts the Treasury made in 1989, 1990 and 1991 of the duration and depth of the recession.

Mr. Nelson: Treasury forecasts were published in 1989, 1990 and 1991 in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" and Autumn Statement.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecasts the Treasury made in 1992 of the extent of the present recovery.

Mr. Nelson: Treasury forecasts were published in the March 1992 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" and the November 1992 Autumn Statement report.

Bank of England

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to privatisation of the Bank of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no plans to privatise the Bank of England.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the review of trade performance in his Budget speech, if he will show for manufactures, finished manufactures and semi-manufactures, the increase in the volume of imports and exports from *(a)* the EEC and *(b)* other countries in (i) the latest three months and (ii) in the year 1993, together with his estimate of the growth of the market for imports in those markets.

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *939*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the average percentage increase in the volume of exports and imports of manufactures *(a)* in 1972 to 79 and *(b)* 1965 to 72, the relative volume and relative value in (i) 1965, (ii) 1972,

(iii) 1979 and (iv) 1993, together with the balance of exports against imports in terms of value.

Mr. Nelson: Information about exports and imports of manufactures from which percentage increases, relative volumes, relative values and balances may be derived can be found on the Central Statistical Office database which may be accessed through the Library of the House. The information is not available for years prior to 1970.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the nominal and real exchange rates of the lira against the pound sterling and *(b)* the balance of payments between the United Kingdom and Italy for each quarter since July 1992.

Mr. Nelson: Exchange rate data for the United Kingdom and Italy in both nominal and real terms—adjusted for relative price movements in a number of other competitor countries—can be found in the IMF publication "International Financial Statistics". However, sterling's real bilateral exchange rate against the Italian lira is unavailable.

Data for bilateral trade in visibles between the United Kingdom and Italy may be found on the Central Statistical Office database, available in the House of Commons Library. Data for bilateral trade in invisibles are also available on the database, but in annual form only. Further information about these invisibles figures can be found in an article entitled "Geographical analysis of the overseas invisibles account" in the June 1994 edition of "Economic Trends".

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will complete the United Kingdom entry to the October issue of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Mr. Nelson: Responsibility for the publication "Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade" lies with the OECD. However, the CSO has provided the OECD with the required data and asked for the series to be updated. The Central Statistical Office is also arranging for this data to be supplied to the OECD regularly in the future.

Chocolate Confectionery

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the *(a)* production, *(b)* imports, *(c)* exports and *(d)* consumption of chocolate confectionery in (i) 1964, (ii) 1973, (iii) 1979 and (iv) 1993.

Mr. Nelson: The available data on the production, imports and exports of chocolate and chocolate confectionery are as follows:

		Production	*Imports*	*Exports*	*Implied Consumption*
1963	£ million	143.5	n/a	n/a	n/a
	000s tonnes	422.2	—	—	—
1973	£ million	270.2	7.1	23.6	253.7
	000s tonnes	408.7	13.1	42.2	379.7
1979	£ million	797.4	44.9	104.1	738.1
	000s tonnes	409.7	25.9	63.2	372.4
1993	£ million	1,857.5	267.4	297.4	1,827.5
	000s tonnes	613.0	121.4	129.1	605.2

Source:
CSO
Production data—Census of Production (1963);
Quarterly Sales Inquiries (1973 and 1979);
PRODCOM (1993)
Imports and Exports—Business Monitor MM20A (1973 and 1979);
Business Monitors MM20 and MQ20 (1993)

The production data values represent the invoiced sales of manufacturers at current prices. The data prior to 1993 only cover those manufacturers with 25 or more employees. Data for 1964 are not available—data from the 1963 census of production have been provided as the nearest equivalent.

The implied consumption figures are calculated as production plus imports less exports. They represent the total market for chocolate and chocolate confectionary in the United Kingdom. Consumption data based on the prices paid by consumer in the shops, as opposed to those charged by manufacturers, is shown:

	Consumption £ million
1963	n/a
1973	364.7
1979	1,065.0
1993	2,938.0

Source:
MAFF estimates.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is his estimate of the amount by which the money supply would have to increase in terms of MO and M4 to accommodate an increase in the work force in employment to the 1990 level without an increase in the velocity of circulation;

(2) what was the velocity of circulation of MO and M4 for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: There is no simple link between money supply and employment. In the long run, increases in money supply result in inflation, which is detrimental to activity and employment. Employment prospects are best increased by the achievement of sustained economic growth. This requires structural policies to improve the long run performance of the economy and a stable macro-economic environment with low inflation.

Table 6.2 is the Central Statistical Office monthly publication, "Economic Trends", shows the velocity of circulation for MO and M4.

Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will describe the method he has used to back his assertion in the Red Book, paragraph 3.47, that exporter's margins in the third quarter of this year had regained their pre-exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Nelson: The measure of export profit margins used in paragraph 3.47 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" is the ratio of the manufacturing export price average value index to the Treasury's estimates of manufacturers' total unit costs.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the increase stated in his Budget speech for non-oil exports to EEC countries in the three months to August took account of the under-recording of exports to the EEC in 1993; and if he will publish for the most recent three months in each case the increase in the volume of exports to *(a)* the EEC and *(b)* non-EEC countries since 1992, together with the increase in United Kingdom manufacturing output.

Mr. Nelson: I have no reason to believe that the growth of non-oil exports to other EC countries between the three months to August 1994 and the same three months in 1993 is either under or over-recorded.

Figures for exports to other EC countries and to non-EC countries and for manufacturing output are available on the Central Statistical Office database, which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library.

Economic Growth

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average rate of economic growth between *(a)* 1964 and 1973 and *(b)* 1973 and 1993.

Mr. Nelson: The average annual growth rate of real gross domestic product between 1964 and 1973 was 3.1 per cent. The average growth rate between 1973 and 1993 was 1.6 per cent. Within this period, the average growth rate over the past 10 years has been significantly higher than over the previous 10 years.

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact on the retail prices index of the price of foreign holidays; and if he will give the balance of payments on tourism each year since 1970, together with the change in the terms of trade for manufactures, based on the second half of 1973=100.

Mr. Nelson: Foreign package holidays were introduced into the retail prices index in February 1993. In 1994 this component comprised 29 parts per thousand of the all-items "basket" of goods and services. At November 1994, the latest date for which information is available, the 12-month percentage increase in the foreign holidays' index was 2.4 per cent.

Data on the balance between expenditure by overseas residents visiting the UK and expenditure by UK residents visiting abroad are published in the "Business Monitors", MA6 and MQ6, entitled "Overseas travel and tourism".

Terms of trade for manufactures can be derived from unit value indices, based on 1990=100, available from the CSO database which can be accessed through the Library of the House.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount by which the exchange rate would have to fall to enable the United Kingdom to bring the current account back into balance *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding North sea oil at the current level of employment, all other things being equal.

Mr. Nelson: The latest figures show that the current account is no longer in deficit. In the third quarter of 1994 there was a current account surplus of £800 million and the current account excluding oil was close to balance at—£200 million.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the value of the pound sterling against the deutschmark and the French franc in December of the years 1970, 1980, 1990 and 1994.

Mr. Nelson: Monthly data on exchange rates are published by the CSO in table 7.1A of financial statistics. These data are also available on the CSO database which can be accessed through the Members' Library.

Income Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual rate of increase in consumers' real expenditure and real disposable incomes *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* between 1964 and 1973; and if he will account for the difference.

Mr. Nelson: The annual rate of increase between 1979 and 1993 as 2.6 per cent. in consumers' expenditure and 2.7 per cent. in personal disposable income, both measured at constant—1990—prices. Between 1964 and 1973 the rates of growth were 3.0 per cent. and 3.2 per cent. respectively.

A large number of factors, both domestic and international, influence the growth of consumption and real personal disposable income. There is no simple explanation that can account for developments in these variables over such a long period of economic history.

The residual difference between personal disposable income and consumers' expenditure constitutes saving. Saving at constant prices is not published, but the principle is the same and the difference between real personal disposable income and real consumers' expenditure may be regarded as "real" saving.

The proportions of disposable income devoted to expenditure and saving vary constantly.

Current Account

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the extent to which the improvement in the current account deficit in 1994 forecast in the Red Book is due to *(a)* an improvement in the balance of visible trade less oil and erratics; and *(b)* an improvement in the balance of trade in finished manufactures (i) with the EEC and (ii) with other countries.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury does not publish forecasts of the balance of visible trade less oil and erratics or of the balance of finished manufactures. Nor does it publish forecasts separately for trade with other EC countries and

with non-EC countries. Forecasts of the balances of trade in manufactures, oil and other goods are shown in Table 3.3 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Figures for the first three quarters of 1994 are available on the Central Statistical Office database, which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount by which the exchange rate would have to fall to enable the United Kingdom to bring the current account back into balance in conditions of full employment at the maximum sustainable rate of growth, all other things being equal.

Mr. Nelson: Achieving the maximum sustainable rate of growth depends on continuously improving all aspects of performance across the whole economy—on competitiveness in a broad sense.

Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage share of gross domestic product was accounted for by manufacturing output in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France, *(d)* Italy, *(e)* Holland and *(f)* Belgium in (i) 1968, (ii) 1973, (iii) 1979, (iv) 1990 and (v) 1993.

Mr. Nelson: Such information as is available is published in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication "National Accounts", detailed tables, volume II, which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what is the rate of growth of exports of United Kingdom finished manufactures to *(a)* the EEC and *(b)* the rest of the world for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: Information about exports of UK manufactures from which rates of growth may be derived can be found on the CSO database which may be accessed through the Library of the House. Volume information is available only from 1988, but information at current prices is available from 1972.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show the net operating surplus of manufacturing as a percentage of net capital stock in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the USA, *(c)* Japan and *(d)* Germany in (i) 1968, (ii) 1973, (iii) 1980, (iv) 1987, (v) 1990 and (vi) 1993; what was the corresponding increase in manufacturing output based on 1968 = 100; and what was the relationship between the two series.

Mr. Nelson: Information on United Kingdom net rates of return for manufacturing industrial and commercial companies since 1970 is available from the CSO's shared database and is published in the CSO "First Release", (94)205—"Profitability of UK Companies". Information on manufacturing activities relating to all economic sectors is unavailable. Information on rates of return for OECD countries since 1980 is published in Table 14 of OECD's national accounts, volume II. Rates of return achieved in different countries are not directly comparable because different assumptions are used in their calculation. Both publications are available from the Library of the House.

Index numbers of manufacturing output are available back to 1974. Using 1980 as a base year they are:

	UK	*USA*	*Japan*	*West Germany*
1968	99	n/a	n/a	n/a
1973	114	n/a	n/a	n/a
1974	113	84	81	90
1980	100	100	100	100
1987	108	127	122	107
1990	121	139	149	124
1993	115	142	135	n/a

Source:
United Nations Industrial Statistics Yearbook.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the profitability of United Kingdom, United States and German companies in manufacturing each year since 1980.

Mr. Nelson: Information on United Kingdom net rates of return for manufacturing industrial and commercial companies is available from the CSO's central shared database and is published in the CSO First Release, (94)205—"Profitability of UK Companies".

Information on profitability by United States and West German companies is published in table 14 of the OECD's national accounts, volume II. Rates of return achieved in different countries are not directly comparable because of different assumptions used in their calculations. Both publications are available from the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the effect of changes in interest rates and the exchange rate or the rate of return in manufactures; and if he will publish a table setting out the figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: No estimates are available of the effects of interest rate and exchange rate changes on the real rate of return on capital for manufacturing. The latest figures for the rate of return on capital for manufacturing companies are available in table 1 of CSO "First Release" (94)205, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the fall or rise in the average capital employed in manufacturing in real terms between 1979 and 1993 and the corresponding figure for the average capital employed in other non-North sea industrial and commercial companies.

Mr. Nelson: Information on average capital employed at current replacement cost by industrial and commercial companies is published in the CSO "First Release", (94)2025—"Profitability of UK Companies". This is available from the Library of the House. Constant price data are not readily available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the change in the volume of exports of finished manufactures to the EEC in the first quarter of 1993 together with his estimate of the effect of any under-recording.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested and more recent figures are available from the Central Statistical Office database, which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library, and are published in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics", also available in the

House of Commons Library. The figures incorporate adjustments made as a result of the recent quality review of the Intrastat system carried out by Customs and Excise and the Central Statistical Office.

National Debt

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current ratio of the national debt to gross domestic product; and what was the average figure for the 1970s.

Mr. Nelson: At end-March 1994, the national debt was 46½ per cent. of gross domestic product. The average ratio for the 1970's was 52¾ per cent. of GDP.

Companies (Rates of Return)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the net rate of return in 1993 for manufacturing, financial service, North sea oil and gas, and non-North sea industrial and commercial companies less manufacturing.

Mr. Nelson: Information on United Kingdom net rates of return for manufacturing industrial and commercial companies is available from the CSO's central shared database and is published in the CSO "First Release", (94) 205—"Profitability of UK Companies". The net rate of return on capital employed by non-North sea industrial and commercial companies in 1993 was 17 per cent. The net rate of return on capital employed by non-North sea non-manufacturing industrial and commercial companies in 1993 was 9 per cent. Rates of return for the financial services industry are unavailable.

Profits (City of London)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes the Bank of England should take to reduce the rate of profit made by firms in the City of London to the same level as the import competing and export industries.

Mr. Nelson: None. Financial services are themselves import competing and exporting. They made a positive contribution of £15.6 billion to the United Kingdom balance of payments in 1993.

Data Processing Equipment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the rate of return the Government apply in the case of data processing equipment; and how much of that is accounted for by depreciation and how much by the cost of borrowing.

Mr. Nelson: The Government specify a standard rate of discount, which serves as a cost of capital, to ensure that the use of resources by central government is no less efficient at the margin than resources used by the private sector. The rate of 6 per cent. in real term is applied to the internal costing of all central government activities, including acquisition of data processing equipment.

The rate of depreciation will depend on the expected life of the equipment, and will vary from case to case.

In industrial assistance cases, including assistance to manufacturers of data processing equipment, a discount rate of at least 8 per cent. in real term is applied, depending on the commercial rate considered appropriate for the particular investment.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures his Department is taking to encourage the education and training of the long-term unemployed for re-entry into the workplace; and what programmes are available to them.

Mr. Paice: Training is one of the options on the menu of opportunities made available to long-term unemployed people to help them back to work.

Training for long-term unemployed adults is delivered through training for work.

Additionally, the Employment Service offers a wide range of help to provide the individual advice and support that people need to get back to work as quickly as possible.

Restart interviews encourage long-term unemployed people to search for jobs actively; jobclub and the job interview scheme help them to find jobs more effectively; jobplan workshops and restart courses provide opportunities for self-assessment, confidence building and action planning; community action provides work experience for people who have been unemployed for more than 12 months. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget statement on 29 November 1994 set out plans for further help including the extension of workwise and 1-2-1 which offer help to 18 to 24 year-olds who have been unemployed for more than one year.

Preparatory Maritime Conference

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what contribution Her Majesty's Government have made or intends to make to the preparatory maritime conference of the International Labour Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The International Labour Organisation replaced the preparatory maritime conference with a tripartite meeting on maritime labour standards. This took place in Geneva from 28 November to 9 December 1994 and was attended by a full United Kingdom delegation.

Gas (Safety)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the nature of, and give references to, the statutory obligations of *(a)* British Gas plc to maintain standards of safety of all gas supplies and *(b)* the obligations on owners of property or householders in respect of safety of all gas equipment on their property; and what steps he expects to take to vary current statutes consequential to his proposed reorganisation of the gas industry.

Mr. Oppenheim: British Gas plc must comply with the general duties of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. In addition, it must comply with the following specific legislation: the Gas Act 1986, schedule 5, which imposes duties on the public gas supplier to take immediate remedial action when there is a reported escape of gas; the Gas Quality Regulations 1972 and 1983, which impose duties concerning the pressure, odour and purity of gas supplied to consumers; the Gas Safety (Rights of Entry) Regulations 1983, which allow British Gas plc

employees to enter premises to prevent danger, in respect of gas escapes and dangerous gas appliances; the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994, which include duties on those who install and maintain gas appliances and fittings; and the Notification of Installations Handling Hazardous Substances Regulations 1982, which require gas transmission and distribution pipelines to be notified to the Health and Safety Executive.

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994 also impose duties on owners of property and householders. This includes a duty on landlords to maintain appliances which they own in a safe condition, and for such appliances to be checked for safety each year. Householders' duties include, for example, not using appliances which are known or suspected to be unsafe, not searching for gas escapes with a naked flame, and reporting leaks or suspected leaks to the public gas supplier.

The Health and Safety Commission is considering its response to the safety implications of the Government's proposals for liberalisation of the gas market and will respond shortly.

TRANSPORT

London Underground

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many violent crimes were committed on London Underground during each of the past seven years.

Mr. Norris: This information is set out in the table.

London Underground: incidence of violent crime

Year	*Number of incidents*
1988	1,048
1989	1,018
1990	750
1991	685
1992	636
1993	601
1994	613

Source:
British Transport police figures supplied to London Underground.
Note:
[1] Figures include assaults on passengers, staff and police.

Buses (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the changes in the regulations setting down the maximum hours per day or per week which he, or persons whom he has appointed, relating to drivers holding public service vehicle licences for bus services in the area of London Regional Transport, made since 1 January 1985, stating in each case by whom they were made and what consultations preceded changes in those conditions.

Mr. Norris: Regular bus services on routes of less than 50 km are subject to national rules on drivers' hours in part VI of the Transport Act 1968, as amended. Regular services on routes exceeding 50 km are subject to European Community regulations on drivers' hours and tachographs which came into force in 1986.

Since 1985 there have been no changes to either the EC regulations or the national rules which affect the maximum hours per day or per week which an individual may drive. But the introduction of the EC regulations resulted in a number of minor consequent changes to the UK legislation. These changes were all made by statutory instrument and representatives organisations were informed about them. Those which affected bus operations are as follows:

The Community Drivers' Hours and Recording Equipment (Exemptions and Supplementary Provisions) Regulations 1986–SI 1986/1456.

The Community Drivers' Hours and Recording Equipment Regulations—SI 1986/1457.

The Drivers' Hours (Harmonisation with Community Rules) Regulations 1986–SI 1986/1458

The Community Drivers' Hours and recording Equipment (Exemptions and Supplementary Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 1986–SI 1986/1669.

The Community Drivers' Hours and recording Equipment (Exemptions and Supplementary Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 1987–SI 1987/805.

The Community Drivers' Hours and Recording Equipment (Exemptions and Supplementary Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations 1988–SI 1988/760.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will publish the text of penalty clauses included in contracts between Trafalgar House and the Government regarding the Birmingham northern relief road;

(2) what penalty clauses would be brought into force by *(a)* a decision to withdraw Government support for the Birmingham northern relief road and *(b)* a decision to oppose the road; and what would be the cost to the Government.

Mr. Watts: The concession agreement between the Department and Midland Expressway Ltd. is commercially confidential. Provisions for early termination of the concession by either parties are contained in the agreement.

Mr. Mike O' Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government will meet the cost of blight to homes or businesses as a result of the construction of the Birmingham northern relief road.

Mr. Watts: Payments for land compensation, including those relating to blight, are made by the Department in the normal way. The concession agreement provides for Midland Expressway Ltd. to reimburse the Department.

Western Orbital Route

Mr. Mike O' Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the projected western orbital route around the west midlands will be a tolled road.

Mr. Watts: The trunk roads review, published in March 1994, indicated that the western orbital route would be considered for its suitability to be taken forward under a design, build, finance and operate contract which does not require the payment of tolls by road users.

Rail Businesses

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *694*, about the sale of rail

businesses, what is the target date for the sale of each of the businesses listed; and if he will specify the nature and target date for the sale of each of the businesses described as "various businesses in BR central services".

Mr. Watts: It is intended that the rolling stock leasing companies will be offered for sale during 1995. The sale of all of the other businesses listed will be handled by BR's vendor unit.

These businesses will be marketed as soon as they are ready for sale, as speedily as practicable and, in the case of the various central services businesses, using the most appropriate method of sale. It is intended that the majority of these businesses will be offered for sale during 1995 and 1996.

Special Advisers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) of 1 December, *Official Report,* columns *800–01,* if he will make a statement regarding his Department's expenditure on special advisers in each of the last three financial years and for the financial year 1979–80.

Mr. Norris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary on 19 December, *Official Report,* column *937.*

Road Noise

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list his Department's current obligations relating to road noise arising from the construction of new trunk roads.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Howell, dated 12 January 1995:

As you know, since the creation of the Highways Agency, it falls to me as Chief Executive to write to MPs who have tabled questions on matters which relate to operational matters of the Agency.

The Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 require highway authorities to carry out or pay grant towards the cost of insulation of qualifying residential property against traffic noise arising from the use of new or altered roads. Dwellings, or other buildings used for residential purposes, within 300 metres of a new or altered road are eligible for insulation if it is calculated that within 15 years of opening the noise level will increase by 1 dB to a level of at least 68 dB.

The Regulations also allow highway authorities discretion to carry out or pay grant towards the cost of insulation of residential property against noise arising from the construction of new or altered roads.

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what decibel readings his departmental officials are receiving from within 300 of the A3 in the region of Ash Grove, Guildford;

(2) what decibel readings his departmental officials are receiving from within 300 m of the A3 in the region of Weston road, Guildford;

(3) what decibel readings his departmental officials are receiving from within 300 m of the A3 in the region of Burpham and Abbotswood.

Mr. Watts: These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. David Howell, dated 12 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what decibel readings we are receiving from within 300 metres of the A3 at several locations within Guildford.

There is no general monitoring by the Agency of noise levels on the trunk road network and I regret, therefore, that the information you require is not available.

You know that the section of A3 which passes Ash Grove, Weston Road, and Abbotswood (and Burpham) is a post 1969 road. It forms part of the A3 Burpham to Ladymead scheme which opened to traffic in 1981. In his letter of 23 November, Dr. Mawhinney explained that the obligations placed on the Department of Transport by the Land Compensation Act 1973 and associated regulations, both in terms of the noise mitigation measures and compensation for depreciation in the value of property caused by noise, were fully discharged in respect of that scheme. He also explained in some detail why existing unaltered roads in this category could not be reassessed and retreated for noise mitigation.

It follows that no purpose would be served in taking noise measurements along this section of the A3.

Airports

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on proposals for an airport between Abingdon and Wantage.

Dr. Mawhinney: Pleiade Associates has undertaken work on a proposal for such an airport. It has not been the subject of a planning application. If one were made, it would be subject to normal planning procedures.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the "Runway Capacity to Serve the South East" report.

Dr. Mawhinney: I expect to be responding shortly to the consultation on the report of the RUCATSE working group.

Stagecoach Bus Company

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what complaints have been received by the traffic commissioners in respect of the operations of the Stagecoach bus company or any of its subsidiaries; what routes or services have been the subject of such complaints; what action has been taken by the traffic commissioners as a result of such complaints; what has been the outcome of each action taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Traffic commissioners receive a wide variety of complaints about bus operations, including those relating to the Stagecoach bus company and its subsidiaries. Most are of a minor nature. Where the complaints relate to matters within the jurisdiction of the traffic commissioner they are investigated; the companies are notified and steps taken to rectify any deficiencies. Complaints about matters not within the traffic commissioners' jurisdiction are passed on to the appropriate authority to deal with.

More serious complaints involving potential disciplinary action are normally dealt with at a public inquiry. In July 1993 a public inquiry was held into allegations made by Orion Transport Ltd. of intentional interference into their operations by Fife Scottish Omnibuses, a Stagecoach subsidiary. At the inquiry, Fife Scottish Omnibuses Ltd. was given a warning about its future conduct; Orion Transport Ltd. was banned from operating local services. A further public inquiry has been

set for February 1995 to look into complaints about the activities of Western Scottish Buses Ltd., a Stagecoach subsidiary.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) *Official Report,* column *875,* whom he saw and who accompanied him when he made his private visit to Newbury.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* I met no one on my private visit to Newbury. I was accompanied by my private secretary and the chief executive of the Highways Agency.

Maritime Conference

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons Her Majesty's Government have withdrawn support for the specialist maritime conference of the International Labour Organisation; what representations he has received from ship-owning or crew representative bodies in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

At the recent meeting of the International Labour Organisation governing body, the Government expressed the view that maritime issues should be dealt within the mainstream of the ILO and on an equal footing with other sectors of work. The majority view was however to retain a separate maritime conference. Representations were received from the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Review

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to issue the consultation paper on the housing review.

Mr. Moss: I hope to be in a position to publish the consultative paper in March.

Fire Station (Comber)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals there are to provide a new fire station in Comber; what site is involved; what is the estimated cost for such a fire station; and what would be the implications for the existing station in Newtownards.

Mr. Moss: A review conducted by the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland has indicated that Comber and its surrounding area are not being provided with the appropriate standard of fire cover, and the authority is proposing to develop a new fire station in Comber to remedy the deficiency. A suitable site has been identified at Glen Link, beside the Comber bypass, which is owned by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. Retained personnel are being recruited and trained.

The estimated cost of the proposed new station is as follows:

	£
Purchase of site.	46,500
Refurbishment of building etc	176,400
Diversion of electricity cable	48,700
Total	271,600

The new station will have no effect on the existing station in Newtownards, except that in normal circumstances Newtownards will no longer respond to fire calls from the Comber area. This will result in a reduction in the number of incidents attended by the Newtownards fire crew, but the retaining fees and drill fees paid to the Newtownards crew will remain unchanged.

Tower Hill Hospital (Armagh)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many pharmacists were advised of the meeting of the pharmacy practices committee of the Southern health and social services board to be held at the board room in Tower Hill hospital, Armagh, on 8 December 1994; how many attended; in which room this meeting was held; whether pharmacists were advised of any alternative arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: Six pharmacists were advised of the meeting. The local pharmaceutical and medical committees were also advised.

Two pharmacists attended, together with a representative of the local medical committee.

The meeting was held in the supplies department conference room, instead of the boardroom in Tower Hill hospital. The original venue was changed because of central heating problems. Everyone who presented at the boardroom was escorted to the new venue for the meeting.

Sports Council for Northern Ireland

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when funds will be allocated to the Sports Council for Northern Ireland in order that it may make financial contributions towards projects for voluntary sports clubs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Owing to expenditure constraints and other priority demands it was not possible to make funding available to the Sports Council in 1994–95 for capital grants to voluntary sports clubs. In reaching decisions on resource allocation for 1995–96, the needs of the voluntary sports clubs will be taken into account. An announcement will be made when final decisions have been taken.

Nursery Schools

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* maintained and *(b)* controlled nursery schools there are in each of the 26 district council areas.

Mr. Ancram: The information for 1993–94 is as follows:

District Council	Maintained	Controlled	Total
Antrim	1	1	2
Ards	—	2	2
Armagh	—	2	2
Ballymena	—	2	2
Ballymoney	—	1	1
Banbridge	—	2	2
Belfast	14	17	31
Carrickfergus	—	1	1
Castlereagh	—	3	3
Coleraine	—	2	2
Cookstown	—	1	1
Craigavon	1	3	4
Derry	—	8	8
Down	2	1	3
Dungannon	—	2	2
Fermanagh	—	—	—
Larne	1	1	2
Lisburn	4	2	6
Limavady	—	—	—
Magherafelt	—	1	1
Moyle	—	1	1
Newry and Mourne	1	2	3
Newtownabbey	—	5	5
North Down	—	3	3
Omagh	—	1	1
Strabane	—	1	1
Total	24	65	89

WALES

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to make his housing revenue account subsidy determinations for 1995–96.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The determinations have been made by my right hon. Friend today and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

We have decided to confirm the proposal for guidelines rents and management and maintenance allowances, which were set out in my earlier answer on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *743–44*. I have also decided to confirm the other proposals subject to some changes of detail.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many oral questions the hon. member for Leeds, East has sought to table in the current session; and how many have appeared on the Order Paper.

Mr. Newton: Up to and including Tuesday 10 January, the hon. Member had entered 26 questions for oral answer into the shuffle, none of which was successful.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Citizenship

14. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will amend nationality legislation to allow British women to pass on United Kingdom citizenship to their children.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No. The British Nationality Act 1981 already provides for this.

Miscarriages of Justice

15. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the legislation to deal with miscarriages of justice.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We intend to introduce a Bill this Session to establish an independent review body to investigate alleged miscarriages of justice and to refer appropriate cases to the courts. We shall introduce the Bill as soon as we can.

Fines (Non-payment)

16. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are in Her Majesty's prison, Armley for non-payment of fines.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On 14 December, the nearest day to when the question was tabled for which figures are readily available, 11 prisoners were held in Leeds prison for failing to pay their fine.

Executive Agencies

17. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on bonus payments for the chief executives of the next steps agencies which report to his Department.

Mr. Howard: The Directors General of the Prison Service and of the Forensic Science Service, and the chief executive of the United Kingdom Passport Agency, are eligible for bonus payments on the basis of performance measures agreed between them and the Department. The present chief executive of the Fire Service College is eligible for performance pay increases in the same way as other members of his grade.

Rules and Regulations

18. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the rules and regulations governing Home Office matters which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months; and what has been the consequent reduction to his Department's manpower.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Records of changes to Home Office rules and regulations are not kept in the precise form requested, but the following are the main changes made to Home Office legislation affecting business in the last 12 months:

the Sunday Trading Act 1994 has reduced and clarified the restrictions on Sunday Trading;

the Shops Act 1950 has been abolished;

the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act included amendments to the Licensing Act 1964, the Sunday Observance Act 1780, the Charities Acts 1992 and 1993 and the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963.

These changes have not significantly affected Home Office manpower since the Home Office was not generally responsible for enforcing the legislation concerned.

Drug Abuse

19. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his initiatives designed to combat drug abuse among young people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Local drugs prevention teams are working with communities in different areas of the country to help prevent the spread of drugs misuse. Over 1,300 separate local initiatives have been supported, many involving young people themselves.

Doncaster Prison

20. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Judge Stephen Tumim last inspected Doncaster prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Judge Tumim and his inspection team have not yet inspected Doncaster prison. They are scheduled to inspect it during March 1996.

Greater Manchester Police

21. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the inaccurate press release issued by his Department on 1 December 1995–96 spending allowances for the Greater Manchester police.

Mr. Maclean: Under the Government's proposals announced on 1 December 1994 and as stated in Home Office news release 258/94, £324.38 million will be available to the Greater Manchester police in 1995–96.

Sentences

22. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about sentencing tariffs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I receive numerous represe..tations about maximum penalties from a variety of sources.

Wales

24. **Mr. Llwyd:** Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the performance of Home Office functions in Wales.

Mr. Howard: Our objective is to ensure that all functions in Wales for which the Home Office has responsibility are delivered effectively and efficiently. This is fully reflected in Home Office funding which provides in Wales—as in England—appropriate resources, consistent with the Government's priorities and the need to control public spending.

Fire Authorities

25. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had concerning the funding difficulties faced by fire authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment receive such representations from time to time.

Prisons (Drugs)

26. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the percentage of British prisons in which the use of illegal drugs use is widespread.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 enables the introduction of mandatory drug testing. This will enable an assessment of the extent of drug misuse to be made.

Right to Silence

27. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect to date of changes in respect of the right to silence introduced in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Mr. Maclean: These provisions have not yet come into force. We intend to implement them in the spring of this year.

Police, London

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of police constables in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In October 1994, the most recent date for which figures are available, there were 21,183 police constables on the strength of the Metropolitan police and 679 on the strength of the Metropolitan police and 679 on the strength of the City of London police.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are assigned to work on drugs matters in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that over 200 police officers are assigned to full-time duties on drugs-related matters; this includes officers designated to specialist drug squads and other assigned to carry out specific work in individual divisions. Officers performing general duties may of course have to deal with any type of crime, including drug-related offences, in the course of their duties.

Crime

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he proposes during 1995 for tackling the fear of crime.

Mr. Maclean: Fear of crime can reduce the quality of life for individuals and the public is right to express concern. But, it is important to distinguish between realistic concern and that debilitating anxiety that makes people afraid to participate fully in everyday life. But there are no acceptable levels of crime, and the Home Office will continue to give a high priority to tackling crime and the fear of it during 1995.

First and foremost is the "Partners Against Crime" initiative which was launched by the Home Secretary in September 1994. The campaign encourages individual members of the public to join the police as partners in the fight against crime. Through neighbourhood watch schemes, the special constabulary, neighbourhood constables, street watch, youth action groups and crime prevention panels individuals can make a difference and

also gain a sense of empowerment, which in turn helps to reduce the fear of crime.

We welcome and encourage the use of technology and we will shortly be assessing the bids and announcing the winners of the closed circuit television competition which the Home Secretary announced last October.

Tackling crime is of course a matter for everyone, and the Home Office will continue to work closely with other organisations and Government Departments—such as the Department of the Environment on the single regeneration budget and the safer cities programme; and the Department of Transport, which has commissioned a national review of transport-related crime and perceptions of safety.

Publicity material providing practical advice on measures which people can take to help keep themselves, their families and their property safe will be maintained and promulgated.

Police (Video Cameras)

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards the use of video cameras by police forces during affrays.

Mr. Maclean: General Home Office guidelines on the use of equipment in police surveillance operations were published in 1984. A copy is in the Library. It is for individual chief constables to decide whether to use video cameras in a particular operation.

Firearms

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent the Metropolitan police have currently adopted his Department's guidance on best practice systems for administering the Firearms Acts; and if he will publish the estimated costs to the Metropolitan police of each type of licence together with the appropriate Home Office best practice cost in each case.

Mr. Maclean: The administration of the firearms licensing system is a matter for individual chief officers of police. However, I understand that the Metropolitan police have in nearly all cases implemented the best practice guidelines on the administration of the firearms licensing system which we issued to all chief officers of police in 1991. Where the recommendations have not been implemented, this is principally due to the organisational structure of the Metropolitan police.

The cost to the Metropolitan police of each type of licence is not available. Costings of best practice are contained in a study undertaken in 1992 by the independent consultants Ernst and Young. A copy of their report is in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Government's position on the licensing of the use of bovine somatotropin in the EC.

Mrs. Browning: The Government have made clear their view that any final decision on the licensing of bovine somatotropin should be based firmly on the statutory licensing criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. It should be for the marketplace to determine whether BST has a role to play. On the basis of the scientific evidence and advice currently available, the products concerned meet those criteria and pose no hazard to animal health or welfare of public safety. As my right hon. Friend reported to the House on 15 December 1994 therefore, *Official Report*, columns *793–94*, at the December Council of Agriculture Ministers meeting, he voted against a presidency compromise to extend the moratorium on BST until 31 December 1999, as this was without scientific justification. The decision was, however, adopted by qualified majority.

Dairy Products (New Zealand)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if further steps were taken to facilitate continuing access to the United Kingdom market for New Zealand *(a)* butter and *(b)* cheese after renegotiation of the conditions of United Kingdom entry into the EEC; what was (1) United Kingdom output of butter and the tonnage of imports and exports from and to (2) New Zealand, (3) the EEC Six, (4) Denmark, (5) the Irish Republic and (6) other countries and what was (i) the corresponding information for the EEC Six, (ii) the tonnage of EEC cheese dumped on world markets, (iii) the difference between the common agricultural policy price and the New Zealand export price to third markets and (iv) the cost of cheese support of all kinds to the taxpayer or consumer in (w) 1968, (x) 1979, (y) 1989, and (z) 1994 to date.

Mr. Jack: The United Kingdom's treaty of accession provided for the import of declining quantities of butter and cheese from New Zealand at reduced rates of import levy for the years 1973 to 1977 with the possibility, for butter but not for cheese, of continuation beyond that date. The arrangements for butter have been prolonged up to the present, by successive unanimous Community decisions relating to quantity and rate of levy. The imports of cheese were terminated at the end of 1977 in accordance with the treaty but new arrangements were made with effect from 1 January 1980 for the import of certain quantities on special terms.

As a result of the GATT Uruguay round agreement, both arrangements are to be put on a permanent basis from 1 July 1995. The annual quantity of butter from New Zealand will be raised from its present level to 76,667 tonnes at a tariff of 86.88 ecu/100 kg, and the annual quantity of cheese will be maintained at 9,500 tonnes at tariff of 17.06 ecu/100 kg.

Information concerning United Kingdom production of butter for years 1979 and 1989 is available from "Agriculture in the United Kingdom". Data for 1968 are not available on the same basis and estimates for 1994 are not yet available. Detailed information on imports to the United Kingdom and exports to particular countries for the years requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Trade information is published in the annual statement of trade of the United Kingdom 1968, Customs and Excise; DTI "Business Monitor" "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" 1979; CSO Business Monitor, "MA20 1989; and CSO Business Monitors", MM20 and MQ20 June 1994.

Information on the production of butter in EU member states for 1979,1989 and 1992—latest— is published in "The Agricultural Situation in the Community"—

Commission of the European Communities— and for 1968 can be found in the FAO production yearbook for 1970. Imports and exports of butter by EU member states are published by Eurostat. The publications contain total volumes of cheese exported to third countries. A small quantity of cheese which does not receive an export refund will be included.

There is no common agricultural policy price for cheese in the EU and information on New Zealand export prices of cheese to third countries is not readily available.

Cheese is supported under the Community dairy regime through export refunds private storage aid for certain long keeping cheese and, until 1 August 1994, public intervention in Italy for two types of cheese. It is not possible to estimate the costs of cheese support to consumers and taxpayers without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions about alternative policies which would have obtained in the absence of the CAP, and the effects of those policies. However, EU budgetary expenditure under the CAP in respect of cheese is as follows:

Year	*Mecu*
1968	n/a
1979	17
1989	596
1993	800

The applicable conversion rates into sterling are 1979: 0.64924, 1989: 0.65475, 1993: 0.78627.
Source:
FEOGA.

Agricultural Support

Mr. Austin Michell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the difference between the guaranteed or support price for butter, cheese and lamb under the common agricultural policy and the New Zealand export price to third markets; and what is his estimate of the total cost per year in each case to United Kingdom taxpayers and consumers of the higher prices or support arrangements.

Mr. Jack: The current intervention price for butter is 2,718 ecu/tonne. There is no common agricultural policy price for cheese in the EU. The current basic price set for sheepmeat is 3,882.3 ecu/tonne.

New Zealand prices of the products to third markets are not readily available.

It is not possible to estimate the costs of agricultural support to United Kingdom consumers and taxpayers without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions about alternative policies which might obtain in the absence of the CAP, and the effects of those policies. Public expenditure in the United Kingdom under the CAP and on national grants and subsidies is given in table 9.1 of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom".

Mr. Austin Michell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the additional cost to the consumer of all forms of agricultural support including the higher prices as a result of tariff and other restrictions on imports from third countries since 1972.

Mr. Jack: Any estimate would be dependent upon hypothetical assumptions about the policies which would otherwise have obtained and the effects of those policies.

Estimates of the costs of support policies have been made in recent years by the Organisation for Economic Co–operation and Development for the EU as a whole using a particular set of assumptions. These estimates are available in OECD's annual publication "Agricultural Policies, Markets and Trade: Monitoring and Outlook Report". It should be noted, however, that the OECD figures represent an over–estimate of the savings which could be made by consumers and taxpayers because, with the abolition of agricultural support, would prices for many commodities would be higher.

Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hauliers were prosecuted for cruelty to animals they were exporting in each year since 1989; and how many of those prosecutions proved successful in each year.

Mrs. Browning: The information is not available in this detail.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will show, by type, the number of animals exported for slaughter in each year since 1985, with the expected figures for 1994.

Mrs. Browning: The available information is given in the following tables, excluding 1993 for which no figures were available.

Animals inspected and certified as fit for transportation prior to export from Great Britain

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
1. Immediate Slaughter					
Cattle	150	187	1,014	136	358
Sheep	10,381	154,017	182,781	262,647	216,886
Pigs	—	—	—	—	24
Totals	10,531	154,204	183,795	262,783	217,268
2. Further Fattening					
Cattle	—	132	574	323	1,712
Calves	142,431	190,683	365,166	234,651	302,223
Sheep	11,761	7,745	130,775	184,120	275,006
Pigs	—	1,321	—	—	—
Totals	154,192	199,881	496,515	419,094	578,941

	1990	1991	1992	1994 (to November)
1. Immediate Slaughter				
Cattle	175	154	115	6,662
Sheep	186,038	196,870	326,777	81,760
Pigs	—	3,297	691	7,201
Goats	—	—	150	1
Totals	186,213	200,321	327,733	95,624
2. Further Fattening				
Cattle	284	187	40	—
Calves	338,806	399,599	420,620	500,530
Sheep	302,871	576,632	1,046,880	966,373
Pigs	—	9,963	1,911	11,570
Goats	—	—	—	2
Totals	641,961	986,381	1,469,451	1,478,475

Source:
Annual Reports of the Chief Veterinary Officer; ANIMO figures for 1994 January–November.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the absenteeism rate for his Department in 1991, 1992, and 1993.

Mr. Jack: The information is not currently available, but steps are being taken to ensure that it will be in future.

Beef

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further steps were taken after the issue of Cmnd 6003—"Membership of the European Community Report on Renegotiation"—to facilitate continuing access to the United Kingdom market for imports of beef from third countries; and if he will publish (i) United Kingdom output of beef and the tonnage of imports and exports in 1968, 1979, 1989 and the current year to date from and to Argentina, Australia, the EEC Six, the Irish Republic, and other countries, (ii) the corresponding information for the EEC Six, (iii) the tonnage of EEC beef dumped on world markets, (iv) the difference between the common agricultural policy price and the Australian export price to third markets and (v) the cost of beef support of all kinds.

Mr. Jack: The European Union operates several concessionary import quotas providing for beef imports at reduced rates of levy or duty, including to the United Kingdom. These include a quota for frozen beef and veal; two quotas for high-quality "Hilton" beef; and a beef and veal quota for certain developing countries under the Lomé convention. The EU has also agreed new market access commitments as part of the GATT Uruguay round. These will see import tariffs generally reduced over the period 1995 to 2000.

Information concerning United Kingdom production of beef for years 1979 and 1989 are available from agriculture in the United Kingdom. Data for 1968 are not available on the same basis and estimates for 1994 are not yet available. Detailed information on imports to the UK and exports to particular countries for the years requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Trade information is published in the annual statement of trade of the United Kingdom 1968, Customs and Excise; DTI "Business Monitor" "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" 1979, CSO " Business Monitor", MA20 1989; and CSO "Business Monitors," MM20 and MQ20 June 1994.

Information on the output of beef in EU member states for 1979, 1989 and 1992—latest—is published in "The Agricultural Situation in the Community"—Commission of the European Communities—and for 1968 can be found in the FAO production yearbook for 1970. Imports and exports of beef by EU member states are published by Eurostat. The publications contain total volumes of beef exported to third countries.

Within the common agricultural policy, an annual intervention price is set for beef. In 1993–94 this was 3,216 ecu/tonne. An average Australian export price for beef to third markets in 1993, as reported to the GATT under the arrangement regarding bovine meat to which Australia is a signatory, was the equivalent of 2,243 ecu/tonne—the average of total beef and veal exports including canned products.

It is not possible to estimate the costs of beef support to consumers and taxpayers without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions about alternative policies which would have obtained in the absence of the CAP, and the effects of those policies. Community budgetary expenditure under the CAP in respect of beef is estimated to be 3,458 MECU—£2,671 million—in 1994 (a)(b). This compares with expenditure in 1993 of 3,986 MECU—£3,134 million—(c).

(a) Source: EAGGF guarantee, DG VI G2, early warning report 12/94.
(b) EAGGF year runs from 16 October to 15 October.
(c) Source: EAGGF guarantee, DG VI G2, annual financial report.

Lamb

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the output of and tonnage of imports and exports for lamb for *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* New Zealand, *(c)* Denmark, *(d)* the Republic of Ireland and *(e)* the EEC Six; what tonnage of EEC lamb was dumped on world markets; what was the difference between the common agricultural policy price and the New Zealand export price to third markets; and what was the cost of lamb support in (i) 1968, (ii) 1979, (iii) 1989 and (iv) 1994.

Mr. Jack: Information concerning United Kingdom production of lamb for years 1979 and 1989 are available from Agriculture in the United Kingdom. Data for 1968 are not available on the same basis and estimates for 1994 are not yet available. Trade information is published in the annual statement of trade of the United Kingdom 1968, Customs and Excise; DTI "Business Monitor" "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" 1979; CSO "Business Monitor", MM20 and MQ20 June 1994.

Information on the output of lamb in the EU member states for 1979, 1989 and 1992—latest—is published in "The Agricultural Situation in the Community"—Commission of the European Communities—and for 1968 can be found in the FAO production yearbook for 1970. Imports and exports of lamb by EU member states are published by Eurostat. The publications contain total volumes of lamb exported to third countries. New Zealand lamb output is published in annual FAO production yearbooks; import and export information is published annually in FAO trade yearbooks.

The basic price set for the EU sheepmeat regime is 3,882.3 ecu/tonne. The New Zealand export price to third markets is not readily available.

It is not possible to estimate the costs of lamb support to consumers and taxpayers without making a large number of hypothetical assumptions about alternative policies which would have obtained in the absence of the CAP, and the effects of those policies. Community budgetary expenditure under the CAP in respect of the sheepmeat regime is given in the following table:

Year	*Mecu*
1968	n/a
1979	0
1989	1,453
1993	1,800

The applicable conversion rates into sterling are 1989: 0.65475; 1993: 0.78627.

Source:
FEOGA.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 13 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Divorce Law Reform

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to publish a White Paper on divorce law reform.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is considering the case for legislation in the light of the Government's consultation on divorce reform. He therefore has no immediate plans for publication of a White Paper.

Domestic Violence Bill

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to publish the family home and domestic violence Bill.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Soon.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Commissioners

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many European Commissioners there were in January 1972; and how many there will be following the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden; what additional functions the Commission has been given since 1 January 1972; what was the cost of the Commissioners and their cabinets in 1972; and what it will be in 1995.

Mr. Baldry: There were nine members of the European Commission in January 1972. When Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the Union on 1 January this year, the number of Commissioners became 20. The 1986 Single European Act and the 1993 Maastricht treaty extended the areas of Community activity in which the Commission has functions to perform. These areas include the environment, research, education and health. There is no separate line in the EC budget covering the basic salaries of the Commissioners and their cabinets. We could provide these figures only at disproportionate cost.

Somalia (Family Reunions)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration underlay the decision to appoint only one extra entry clearance officer for Somali family reunion cases to reduce the waiting period for interview; what action he will take to ensure that the waiting period is reduced to a period of two to three months; and what was the reason for the time taken to identify and deal with the delay in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Baldry: Lack of office accommodation has meant that it has been possible to deploy only one extra ECO in Addis Ababa for the time being. New accommodation should be available by mid-1995. We would then hope to be able to deploy additional staff, resources permitting.

ENVIRONMENT

Air Pollution

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sites for recording air pollution in Staffordshire.

Mr. Atkins: The Department of the Environment, in co-operation with local authorities, operates two national monitoring networks measuring the levels of smoke and sulphur dioxide, on a daily basis, and the levels of nitrogen dioxide using passive diffusion tube samplers.

The monitoring sites in Staffordshire are as follows:

(a) smoke and sulphur dioxide

Cannock, Rugeley, Burton upon Trent, Biddulph, Cheadle and Stoke on Trent.

(b) nitrogen dioxide

Burton upon Trent, Codsall, Leek, Stafford and Tamworth.

There are four diffusion tube sites in each area.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what pollutants are included in the collection of air samples at his Department's monitoring stations.

Mr. Atkins: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 20 December 1994 to the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), *Official Report*, columns *1108–9*.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how factors of deprivation are taken into account in allocation of the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: Paragraph 35 of the SRB "Bidding Guidance" issued in April 1994, copies of which are in the Library of the House, explains how factors of deprivation have been taken into account in assessing SRB bids in round 1. Copies of the "Index of Local Conditions", which is referred to in paragraph 35 of the "Bidding Guidance", have also been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those councils which employed consultants to assist them with their bids for single regeneration budget and the names of the consultants they employed.

Mr. Curry: This information is a matter for local authorities and is not held centrally.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the estimated cost of work done by councils in submitting unsuccessful bids for the single regeneration budget *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the east midlands;

(2) what is the estimated cost of the work done by councils in submitting bids for the single regeneration budget *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Nottinghamshire and *(c)* in Nottingham.

Mr. Curry: This information is a matter for local authorities and is not held centrally.

Sustainability

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of reference for the United Kingdom sustainability round table; who are the participant bodies; by what criteria they are chosen; how wide was the invitation; and whether he will ensure that proper regard is given to the requirements of the manufacturing and construction sectors in evaluating the outcome of the round table.

Mr. Atkins: We issued a consultation paper in October 1994. We have considered responses to it, and will be making our conclusions known shortly.

Land Use Planning

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals for EU involvement in land use planning were discussed by Ministers in Leipzig on 22 September; and what proposals his Department will be supporting for EU involvement in housing and planning at the Council of Ministers' meeting to be held on 30 to 31 March.

Sir Paul Beresford: No proposals for EU involvement in land use planning were discussed by Ministers in Leipzig on 22 September. Further, it is not expected that proposals for EU involvement in housing and planning will be discussed at the informal Council of Ministers meeting on 30 to 31 March.

Greenways Landfill

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) for what purposes his Department's officials or legal representatives have met with Greenways Landfill or its legal representatives since his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what were the reasons for his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction. landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit submitted by Greenways Landfill; and if he will make a statement;

(3) who are the representatives of Greenways Landfill that his officials have met since his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit; and if he will make a statement;

(4) on what occasions his Department's officials, or legal representatives, have met with Greenways Landfill or its legal representatives since his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit; and if he will make a statement;

(5) for what purposes his Department's officials or legal representatives have corresponded with Greenways Landfill or its legal representatives since his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit; and if he will make a statement;

(6) if any circumstances have arisen subsequent to his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit that would cause him to reconsider his decision; and if he will make a statement;

(7) on what occasion his Department's officials or legal representatives have corresponded with Greenways Landfill or its legal representatives since his decision to refuse planning permission for development of clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to refuse planning permission for clay extraction, landfilling and restoration at Aveley No. 3 pit has been quashed by the High Court following a challenge by the applicants, Greenways Landfill. There has been no contact between my officials and Greenways Landfill since the decision was announced in August 1994, although there has been some discussion between the Treasury Solicitor and Greenways' legal representatives over the handling of the High Court challenge. The application must now be redetermined, and we will be writing to interested parties, including the hon. Member for Thurrock, about the next steps. All material considerations, including any changed circumstances and new representations from the parties, will be taken into account.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many grants under the home energy efficiency scheme were made in the last financial year; and what was the sum of money granted in each case.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* A total of 270,000 grants were made during 1993–94, with an average value of £153. Before 9 December 1993, a contribution from the householder, to a maximum of £16, was required in each case. Since then, 100 per cent. grants have been available.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for grants under the home energy efficiency scheme were made in the last financial year; and how many of those applications were turned down.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* Grant in all but a handful of cases—where applicants carry out the work themselves—is paid not to clients but to network installers who have carried out work under the scheme. Inquiries to network installers which do not result in a grant application for work done are not recorded centrally.

TREASURY

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Departments as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Departments in additional expenditure.

Mr. Nelson: The additional costs to the Treasury and Customs and Excise that will be incurred as a result of the changes to the national dialling codes next year are expected to be negligible.

The Inland Revenue estimates the costs for reprogramming its telephone systems and amending its

major information technology systems to be £38,000 and £332,000 respectively.

Government Administration

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column 9, if he will list the principal components of the changing split between administrative costs and programme spending; and if he will specify in which year they were accounted for, for the first time in the annual statistics.

Sir George Young: Departmental running costs were first accounted for separately in 1986–87. The main components are:

Civil service pay, travel and subsistence, training etc;

current expenditure on accommodation, including rent, rates, utilities (eg water and electricity) and maintenance;

office services including stationery, postage, telecommunications, computer maintenance, etc;

comparable contracted out services (net of refundable VAT on qualifying service contracts).

EDUCATION

Training

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what measures his Department is taking to encourage the education and training of the long-term unemployed for re-entry into the workplace; and what programmes are available to them;

(2) what measures her Department is taking to encourage the education and training of women for re-entry into the workplace; and what programmes are available to them;

(3) what measures her Department is taking to encourage the education and training of 16 to 25-year-olds for entry into the workplace; and what programmes are available to them.

Mr. Boswell: The Government's policy is to increase participation in further education and attainment at all levels. Within that overall aim, colleges have a high degree of autonomy, and have the freedom to determine how best to meet the needs of their own local communities.

The Further Education Funding Council has devised a funding formula for colleges which enables the provision of free tuition to various low-income groups, including unemployed people.

The participation rate for women in full-time and part-time further education is higher than that for men in all age groups except 18 and 19-year-olds. The council is introducing further measures to improve the access to further education of people with low incomes who have child care responsibilities.

General national vocation qualifications provide vocational education which prepares young people for employment in a range of occupations or for higher education, and which develops a range of core skills. Nearly 250,000 students have registered for GNVQs since the first pilot courses began in 1992.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will publish the names of the 20 further education colleges described by the Further Education Funding Council as being in financial jeopardy and the 105 where significant adverse variances might limit their ability to deliver their strategic plan and remain financially viable.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Council is required to monitor the financial position of the institutions it funds. The council has recently completed a general survey of college strategic plans for the period 1994–97 and published its conclusions on 22 December 1994; I am arranging to place a copy in the Library. Some of the colleges are in better financial health than others. Because the information may be commercially sensitive and its disclosure damage the colleges concerned, the council does not publish its assessment of individual colleges. I am asking the council's chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current salary of each principal at each incorporated college of further education in England.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not collected by the Department. Further Education Funding Council guidelines on accounting policies recommend that colleges should disclose the emoluments of the principal and other senior postholders in their accounts, which are publicly available.

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many full-time equivalent students are registered on roll at each incorporated college of further education in England; and how many full-time equivalent students were registered on roll at each college of further education in England at 31 March 1993.

Mr. Boswell: Information on the number of students enrolled in academic year 1992–93 at each college in the further education sector is available in issue No. 2 of "The Statistical Bulletin", titled "Information on Early Student Enrolment Statistics" published by the Further Education Funding Council. A copy is available in the Library. Figures for the current academic year are not yet available.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list in descending order the 50 independent schools which received most money from her Department in the financial year 1993–94 through the operation of the assisted places scheme; the amounts which they received; the numbers of pupils at each school; the number of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme at each school; the proportion of the school roll covered by the assisted places scheme; and the fees charged by each of these schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested, as collected for the academic year 1993–94, is given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme 1993–94 academic year

School name	Amount £000s	Number of pupils on roll [1]	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of APs	Fee charged for assisted place holders
Dulwich College	1,288	1,390	269	19.35	5,832
Wisbech Grammar	1,199	635	333	52.44	4,124
St. Edward's College	1,131	993	398	40.08	3,192
Emanuel, London SW11	1,117	752	295	39.23	4,237
Alleyn's, Dulwich	940	1,085	205	18.89	5,351
Latymer Upper	928	1,057	278	26.30	4,338
Royal Grammar, Worcester	883	912	283	31.03	4,035
Hereford Cathedral	821	594	234	39.39	4,080
Newcastle Under Lyme	817	1,295	377	29.11	3,098
Bristol Grammar	814	1,221	280	22.93	3,492
Queen's Elizabeth's, Blackburn	803	1,194	261	21.86	3,477
Bolton School (Boys)	798	1,012	263	25.99	3,960
Wolverhampton Grammar	793	652	255	39.11	4,020
Manchester Grammar	771	1,436	261	18.18	3,592
Haberdashers' Aske's (Boys)	770	1,310	234	17.86	4,899
Bolton School (Girls)	765	1,164	256	21.99	3,960
Wellington, Somerset	749	795	237	29.81	3,907
St. Mary's College, Crosby	734	836	251	30.02	3,339
King Edward VI Southampton	732	939	236	25.13	4,005
Plymouth College	727	881	208	23.61	3,840
St. Bede's College	726	1,115	220	19.73	3,543
James Allen's (Girls)	723	1,059	174	16.43	5,106
King's, Worcester	698	946	179	18.92	4,684
King Edward's Birmingham	689	873	259	29.67	4,023
Godolphin and Latymer	677	705	168	23.83	5,055
William Hulme's Grammar	665	788	220	27.92	3,717
Liverpool College	664	970	183	18.87	3,767
Bradford Grammar	659	1,106	230	20.80	3,516
Batley Grammar	639	579	257	44.39	3,078
Brighton College	631	467	115	24.63	6,171
Colfe's	623	924	194	21.00	4,111
Merchant Taylors', Liverpool	614	818	226	27.63	3,307
Birkenhead High GPDST	613	1,008	243	24.11	3,294
Malvern College	610	827	97	11.73	7,140
City of London	607	872	139	15.94	5,234
Hampton	606	918	198	21.57	4,127
Denstone College	601	298	113	37.92	5,970
Edgehill College	601	561	141	25.13	4,594
Bury Grammar (Girls)	591	1,098	251	22.86	3,105
St. John's College, Southsea	576	824	204	24.76	3,224
Kingston Grammar	575	594	171	28.79	4,380
Stockport Grammar	575	1,280	236	18.44	3,591
Pocklington	562	726	149	20.52	4,267
Old Palace, Croydon	558	778	223	28.66	3,570
Merchant Taylors' (Girls)	554	922	192	20.82	3,309
King's Macclesfield	553	1,168	173	14.81	3,831
Trent College	549	655	131	20.00	5,314
Trinity-of John Whitgift	549	852	147	17.25	4,672
Churcher's College	545	687	140	20.38	4,545
Carmel College	539	219	82	37.44	7,237

[1] As at January 1994

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much her Department spent on the operation of the assisted places scheme; how many pupils were covered by the scheme; and by how much the assisted places scheme overspent its budget in the financial year 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: There were 29,291 pupils covered by the scheme in September 1993. The final outturn expenditure of £92.3 million for the financial year 1993–94 fell within the estimate provision.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list in descending order for the financial year 1993–94 the 50 independent schools with the highest proportions of their school rolls covered by the assisted places scheme; the proportion of pupils on the school's roll and number of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme; and the fees charged by each of these schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested, as collected for the academic year 1993–94, is given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme 1993–94 academic year

School name	Number of pupils on roll	Number of assisted pupils	Percentage of APs to total	Fee charged for APs
Wisbech Grammar	635	333	52.44	4,124
Batley Grammar	579	257	44.39	3,078
St. Edward's College	993	398	40.08	3,192
Hereford Cathedral	594	234	39.39	4,080
Emanuel, London SW11	752	295	39.23	4,237
Wolverhampton Grammar	652	255	39.11	4,020
King Edward VII Lytham	575	221	38.43	3,024
Denstone College	298	113	37.92	5,970
Carmel College	219	82	37.44	7,237
Queen Mary, Lytham	643	231	35.93	3,024
Queen Elizabeth's Hospital	518	178	34.36	3,653
Ursuline High, Ilford	377	128	33.95	3,804
Colston's Girls	519	174	33.53	3,273
St. Joseph's Convent, Reading	392	130	33.16	3,511
La Sagesse Convent	475	155	32.63	3,481
Royal Grammar, Worcester	912	283	31.03	4,035
Farnborough Hill	535	163	30.47	3,903
St. Mary's College, Crosby	836	251	30.02	3,339
Hulme Grammar Girls	628	188	29.94	3,315
Red Maids, Bristol	568	170	29.93	3,543
Friends, Saffron Walden	291	87	29.90	5,580
Wellington, Somerset	795	237	29.81	3,907
Maynards	549	163	29.69	3,555
King Edward's Birmingham	873	259	29.67	4,023
Bristol Cathedral	482	142	29.46	3,702
Newcastle Under Lyme	1,295	377	29.11	3,098
Old Palace, Croydon	778	224	28.79	3,570
Kingston Grammar	594	171	28.79	4,380
Upton Hall Convent	591	168	28.43	2,541
Streatham Hill/Clapham High	572	162	28.32	3,714
Dame Allan's Girls	460	129	28.04	3,189
William Hulme's Grammar	788	220	27.92	3,717
Merchant Taylors' Liverpool	818	226	27.63	3,307
Belvedere GPDST	630	173	27.46	3,294
Latymer Upper	1,057	278	26.30	4,338
Hulme Grammar Boys	815	213	26.13	3,315
Bolton School Boys	1,012	263	25.99	3,960
Bury Grammar Boys	805	204	25.34	3,105
Talbot Heath	541	137	25.32	3,991
Edgehill College	561	141	25.13	4,594
King Edward VI Southampton	939	236	25.13	4,005
Dame Allan's Boys	476	119	25.00	3,189
King's High Girls, Warwick	548	137	25.00	3,416
King Edward VI High	545	136	24.95	3,645
St. Bees	290	72	24.83	6,009
St. John's College, Southsea	824	204	24.76	3,224
Brighton College	467	115	24.63	6,171
Magdalen College	496	121	24.40	4,177
Birkenhead High GPDST	1,008	243	24.11	3,294
Godolphin and Latymer	705	168	23.83	5,055

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement indicating the number of independent schools receiving under the assisted places scheme from her Department, more than *(a)* £1 million, *(b)* over £750,000, *(c)* over £500,000 and *(d)* over £250,000 in payments.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of schools in each category is *(a)* 4, *(b)* 16, *(c)* 66 and *(d)* 160.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the impact of the operation of the assisted places scheme in ensuring the continued operation of the independent schools sector.

Mr. Robin Squire: The assisted places scheme is designed to provide an excellent education for able pupils from less well-off families, not to subsidise independent schools, many of which would fill their places without the aid of the scheme. It is outstandingly successful in meeting its objective, achieves excellent results, and is more popular than ever with parents.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the numbers of foreign-based students covered by the assisted places scheme for each financial year since 1981–82 and the total amounts paid to foreign-based students under the operation of the assisted places scheme in each financial year during this period.

Mr. Robin Squire: Figures for the numbers of foreign based students covered by the assisted places scheme are not collected centrally. To be eligible for an assisted place, all pupils must satisfy the conditions as to residence in the British islands or European Community laid down in the Education (Assisted Places) Regulations 1989.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment her Department has made of the average household income of the pupils applying for assistance under the assisted places scheme; and what is the average household income of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information about the household income of pupils applying for assisted places is not collected centrally. Such information is collected only in respect of pupils actually holding assisted places. Parental income for the purposes of the assisted places scheme is assessed on total family income from all sources, gross of all allowances. For school year 1993–94, the latest for which information is available, over 11,800—40 per cent.—assisted pupils were entitled to a completely free place because their families' income fell below the threshold of £9,225 per annum. The average household income of assisted pupils was £10,854. Over 80 per cent. of parents in the scheme have total family income below the national average household income.

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the number of independent schools operating in England for each financial year since 1975.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information available is given in the following table for January of each calendar year:

Year	*Number of independent schools*
1975	2,477
1976	2,437
1977	2,400
1978	2,379
1979	2,361
1980	2,348
1981	2,339
1982	2,338
1983	2,344
1984	2,331
1985	2,311
1986	2,285
1987	2,276
1988	2,273
1989	2,269
1990	2,283
1991	2,287
1992	2,269
1993	2,261

Note:
The numbers relate to England only and from 1990 include city technology colleges.

Higher Education Courses

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the ratio of students to lecturers in each higher education subject category and in total for each year since 1988.

Mr. Boswell: Information for the former University Funding Council-funded United Kingdom universities is contained in the publication "University Management Statistics and Performance Indicators in the UK" published by the universities statistical record. Statistics for the higher education institutions formerly funded by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council for England have been published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in "Student Staff Ratios in polytechnics and colleges". Copies of both publications are in the House library.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the education component of standard spending assessments per pupil, net of specific grants, in sub-blocks five to 10 and 11 to 15 in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96 in each local education authority and on average; and what was the percentage change in each local education authority and on average from 1992–93 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the table. The figures for 1995–96 and hence the percentage changes are provisional since education standard spending assessments for that year have yet to be finalised.

Education SSAs do not equate to spending on schools since they notionally include spending on heads of expenditure which are not delegated to schools, such as transport, special education and related support services.

Variations between LEAs reflect the different costs of providing a common standard of service across the country, taking account of the relative costs of educating children in different circumstances: in sparsely populated areas; in London and the south-east region where labour costs are higher; and in areas of socio-economic disadvantage or with a high proportion of non-English speaking children.

The figures are in cash terms. Variations between years will be influenced by changes in local authorities' functions and changes in the SSA methodology.

The balance of funding between the five to 10 and 11 to 15 sub-blocks reflects the latest available data on local authority spending on primary and secondary education and is annually updated to reflect changes in spending patterns.

Education component of Standard Spending Assessment per pupil, in sub-blocks 5 to 10 and 11 to 15

	1992–93		*1993–94*		*1994–95*		*1995–96*	
	5 to 10	*11 to 15*	*5 to 10*	*11 to 15*	*5 to 10*	*11 to 15*	*5 to 10*	*11 to 15*
City of London	2,264	3,306	3,015	4,382	3,133	4,392	2,901	9,069
Camden	2,522	3,696	2,724	3,966	2,744	3,850	2,900	3,653
Greenwich	2,377	3,480	2,424	3,524	2,583	3,621	2,711	3,595
Hackney	2,918	4,283	3,126	4,558	2,976	4,180	3,076	4,366
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,593	3,802	2,815	4,101	2,716	3,811	2,904	3,783
Islington	2,701	3,961	2,824	4,114	2,861	4,017	2,888	3,969
Kensington and Chelsea	2,611	3,828	2,755	4,011	2,645	3,710	2,852	4,077

Education component of Standard Spending Assessment per pupil, in sub-blocks 5 to 10 and 11 to 15

	1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	5 to 10	11 to 15	5 to 10	11 to 15	5 to 10	11 to 15	5 to 10	11 to 15
Lambeth	2,950	4,331	3,084	4,497	2,886	4,052	3,066	4,470
Lewisham	2,537	3,718	2,637	3,837	2,685	3,766	2,777	3,787
Southwark	2,695	3,953	2,789	4,062	2,805	3,937	2,947	4,097
Tower Hamlets	2,986	4,385	3,035	4,425	2,975	4,178	3,035	4,041
Wandsworth	2,562	3,756	2,674	3,892	2,549	3,572	2,683	3,624
Westminster	2,593	3,802	2,741	3,991	2,622	3,677	2,750	3,643
Barking and Dagenham	2,074	3,034	2,095	3,042	2,219	3,107	2,231	2,955
Barnet	2,069	3,027	2,130	3,094	2,161	3,024	2,197	2,887
Bexley	1,908	2,787	1,972	2,861	2,068	2,893	2,064	2,739
Brent	2,458	3,604	2,542	3,701	2,454	3,441	2,500	3,454
Bromley	1,883	2,750	1,938	2,811	2,039	2,851	2,013	2,682
Croydon	2,097	3,068	2,143	3,112	2,202	3,083	2,243	3,055
Ealing	2,294	3,360	2,398	3,488	2,356	3,302	2,350	3,229
Enfield	2,088	3,054	2,126	3,088	2,208	3,091	2,234	2,945
Haringey	2,576	3,778	2,670	3,889	2,618	3,674	2,589	3,588
Harrow	1,995	2,916	2,019	2,930	2,110	2,952	2,147	2,903
Havering	1,828	2,668	1,878	2,722	2,057	2,877	2,023	2,691
Hillingdon	1,923	2,809	1,983	2,878	2,120	2,967	2,133	2,843
Hounslow	2,134	3,122	2,165	3,145	2,233	3,128	2,260	2,964
Kingston upon Thames	1,917	2,801	1,957	2,839	2,052	2,870	2,064	2,724
Merton	2,056	3,007	2,121	3,080	2,163	3,028	2,184	2,909
Newham	2,529	3,709	2,586	3,766	2,603	3,653	2,581	3,444
Redbridge	2,008	2,936	2,093	3,038	2,172	3,040	2,164	2,892
Richmond upon Thames	1,932	2,823	1,982	2,875	2,001	2,797	2,015	2,639
Sutton	1,902	2,779	1,972	2,860	2,085	2,916	2,093	2,727
Waltham Forest	2,316	3,393	2,404	3,498	2,440	3,421	2,434	3,266
Birmingham	2,072	3,037	2,131	3,101	2,093	2,934	2,083	2,802
Coventry	1,892	2,769	1,909	2,773	1,948	2,728	1,984	2,652
Dudley	1,700	2,484	1,722	2,498	1,802	2,521	1,813	2,412
Sandwell	1,910	2,796	1,960	2,849	1,976	2,768	1,986	2,646
Solihull	1,721	2,514	1,752	2,542	1,808	2,527	1,798	2,380
Walsall	1,813	2,652	1,829	2,656	1,881	2,633	1,894	2,505
Wolverhampton	2,003	2,934	2,030	2,952	1,997	2,798	1,995	2,695
Knowsley	2,050	3,003	2,084	3,032	2,201	3,087	2,186	2,991
Liverpool	2,061	3,019	2,113	3,075	2,141	3,002	2,110	2,825
St. Helens	1,729	2,527	1,750	2,539	1,851	2,590	1,845	2,471
Sefton	1,769	2,586	1,788	2,596	1,879	2,630	1,875	2,496
Wirral	1,869	2,735	1,891	2,746	1,959	2,744	1,948	2,611
Bolton	1,815	2,654	1,863	2,705	1,869	2,616	1,866	2,492
Bury	1,681	2,456	1,699	2,464	1,786	2,498	1,813	2,409
Manchester	2,150	3,153	2,206	3,211	2,214	3,107	2,258	3,077
Oldham	1,877	2,746	1,866	2,709	1,910	2,674	1,919	2,534
Rochdale	1,805	2,639	1,863	2,706	1,917	2,684	1,932	2,613
Salford	1,853	2,711	1,919	2,788	1,971	2,762	1,975	2,656
Stockport	1,669	2,437	1,689	2,449	1,776	2,484	1,775	2,379
Tameside	1,779	2,601	1,785	2,590	1,827	2,556	1,831	2,432
Trafford	1,745	2,550	1,758	2,551	1,798	2,515	1,830	2,424
Wigan	1,687	2,464	1,727	2,505	1,814	2,537	1,809	2,395
Barnsley	1,765	2,580	1,793	2,602	1,854	2,594	1,869	2,493
Doncaster	1,861	2,720	1,905	2,765	1,943	2,717	1,934	2,576
Rotherham	1,796	2,625	1,819	2,640	1,856	2,596	1,871	2,466
Sheffield	1,815	2,655	1,874	2,722	1,936	2,711	1,922	2,570
Bradford	1,971	2,885	2,022	2,940	1,993	2,791	1,986	2,683
Calderdale	1,808	2,643	1,869	2,714	1,905	2,665	1,896	2,527
Kirklees	1,853	2,710	1,914	2,779	1,912	2,675	1,900	2,543
Leeds	1,813	2,652	1,846	2,680	1,868	2,613	1,864	2,484
Wakefield	1,761	2,574	1,771	2,569	1,816	2,539	1,825	2,425
Gateshead	1,828	2,673	1,886	2,739	1,952	2,733	1,937	2,605
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,908	2,792	1,949	2,832	2,012	2,820	2,045	2,722
North Tyneside	1,797	2,628	1,779	2,582	1,828	2,557	1,845	2,486
South Tyneside	1,836	2,685	1,825	2,649	1,923	2,692	1,932	2,592
Sunderland	1,805	2,640	1,833	2,661	1,925	2,695	1,919	2,553
Isles of Scilly	3,155	4,601	3,140	4,545	3,281	4,570	3,347	4,331
Avon	1,728	2,524	1,779	2,582	1,835	2,566	1,838	2,464
Bedfordshire	1,896	2,772	1,976	2,867	2,011	2,812	1,995	2,668
Berkshire	1,855	2,709	1,906	2,764	1,953	2,730	1,988	2,668
Buckinghamshire	1,826	2,666	1,890	2,740	1,962	2,741	1,966	2,634
Cambridgeshire	1,764	2,576	1,802	2,613	1,847	2,580	1,876	2,512
Cheshire	1,703	2,487	1,746	2,532	1,818	2,542	1,817	2,413
Cleveland	1,894	2,772	1,908	2,772	1,942	2,719	1,940	2,593
Cornwall	1,799	2,627	1,831	2,654	1,878	2,622	1,893	2,525
Cumbria	1,763	2,575	1,820	2,639	1,862	2,600	1,856	2,474

Education component of Standard Spending Assessment per pupil, in sub-blocks 5 to 10 and 11 to 15

	1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	5 to 10	11 to 15	5 to 10	11 to 15	5 to 10	11 to 15	5 to 10	11 to 15
Derbyshire	1,706	2,491	1,739	2,522	1,801	2,516	1,812	2,419
Devon	1,762	2,574	1,817	2,635	1,865	2,605	1,879	2,510
Dorset	1,714	2,502	1,771	2,569	1,828	2,554	1,833	2,445
Durham	1,787	2,611	1,805	2,618	1,879	2,627	1,884	2,516
East Sussex	1,825	2,666	1,941	2,816	1,986	2,776	2,000	2,677
Essex	1,815	2,650	1,882	2,729	1,972	2,756	1,989	2,646
Gloucestershire	1,731	2,528	1,772	2,569	1,819	2,541	1,836	2,439
Hampshire	1,788	2,611	1,867	2,707	1,929	2,696	1,930	2,586
Hereford and Worcester	1,712	2,500	1,734	2,513	1,798	2,511	1,827	2,442
Hertfordshire	1,842	2,689	1,884	2,732	1,970	2,754	2,010	2,667
Humberside	1,817	2,656	1,849	2,684	1,891	2,644	1,891	2,512
Isle of Wight Council	1,875	2,739	1,940	2,813	2,018	2,819	2,016	2,700
Kent	1,807	2,638	1,886	2,734	1,960	2,740	1,968	2,625
Lancashire	1,805	2,639	1,822	2,644	1,867	2,611	1,877	2,506
Leicestershire	1,785	2,608	1,821	2,642	1,855	2,593	1,864	2,487
Lincolnshire	1,809	2,642	1,850	2,682	1,874	2,616	1,873	2,487
Norfolk	1,789	2,612	1,815	2,632	1,863	2,601	1,881	2,512
North Yorkshire	1,738	2,537	1,756	2,544	1,805	2,518	1,827	2,426
Northamptonshire	1,759	2,569	1,796	2,604	1,823	2,547	1,836	2,458
Northumberland	1,743	2,544	1,784	2,587	1,838	2,566	1,825	2,425
Nottinghamshire	1,821	2,662	1,851	2,687	1,872	2,618	1,883	2,512
Oxfordshire	1,798	2,624	1,872	2,714	1,934	2,700	1,934	2,579
Shropshire	1,774	2,589	1,811	2,625	1,850	2,583	1,862	2,482
Somerset	1,745	2,547	1,781	2,582	1,833	2,558	1,846	2,493
Staffordshire	1,704	2,489	1,744	2,528	1,792	2,504	1,805	2,401
Suffolk	1,726	2,520	1,762	2,553	1,807	2,522	1,820	2,434
Surrey	1,828	2,667	1,857	2,691	1,921	2,684	1,998	2,693
Warwickshire	1,723	2,516	1,754	2,543	1,801	2,516	1,822	2,436
West Sussex	1,766	2,578	1,813	2,628	1,918	2,679	1,932	2,575
Wiltshire	1,750	2,555	1,787	2,590	1,824	2,546	1,835	2,455
England	1,873	2,724	1,921	2,775	1,968	2,741	1,981	2,635

Percentage change in unit allowances for Education SSA between 1992–93 and 1995–96

	5 to 10	11 to 15
City of London	28.12	174.34
Camden	14.98	–1.16
Greenwich	14.04	3.28
Hackney	5.43	1.93
Hammersmith and Fulham	11.99	–0.50
Islington	6.94	0.20
Kensington and Chelsea	9.23	6.51
Lambeth	3.95	3.20
Lewisham	9.48	1.85
Southwark	9.36	3.65
Tower Hamlets	1.63	–7.86
Wandsworth	4.71	–3.51
Westminster	6.06	–4.18
Barking and Dagenham	7.58	–2.59
Barnet	6.15	–4.62
Bexley	8.16	–1.73
Brent	1.68	–4.17
Bromley	6.89	–2.47
Croydon	6.96	–0.43
Ealing	2.42	–3.90
Enfield	7.03	–3.56
Haringey	0.50	–5.03
Harrow	7.66	–0.44
Havering	10.86	0.85
Hillingdon	10.93	1.18
Hounslow	5.94	–5.06
Kingston upon Thames	7.66	–2.74
Merton	6.21	–3.28
Newham	2.06	–7.15
Redbridge	7.76	–1.51
Richmond upon Thames	4.30	–6.54
Sutton	10.00	–1.87
Waltham Forest	5.12	–3.74

Percentage change in unit allowances for Education SSA between 1992–93 and 1995–96

	5 to 10	11 to 15
Birmingham	0.50	–7.72
Coventry	4.83	–4.23
Dudley	6.62	–2.92
Sandwell	3.94	–5.39
Solihull	4.44	–5.34
Walsall	4.48	–5.51
Wolverhampton	–0.42	–8.12
Knowsley	6.62	–0.41
Liverpool	2.37	–6.43
St. Helens	6.67	–2.24
Sefton	6.00	–3.48
Wirral	4.21	–4.56
Bolton	2.85	–6.12
Bury	7.84	–1.91
Manchester	4.99	–2.41
Oldham	2.25	–7.71
Rochdale	7.08	–1.01
Salford	6.55	–2.04
Stockport	6.36	–2.40
Tameside	2.29	–6.49
Trafford	4.90	–4.95
Wigan	7.26	–2.81
Barnsley	5.90	–3.39
Doncaster	3.95	–5.29
Rotherham	4.21	–6.07
Sheffield	5.86	–3.20
Bradford	0.79	–7.01
Calderdale	4.86	–4.39
Kirklees	2.57	–6.14
Leeds	2.78	–6.34
Wakefield	3.64	–5.81
Gateshead	5.96	–2.54
Newcastle upon Tyne	7.20	–2.53

Percentage change in unit allowances for Education SSA between 1992–93 and 1995–96

	5 to 10	11 to 15
North Tyneside	2.67	–5.40
South Tyneside	5.23	–3.46
Sunderland	6.30	–3.27
Isles of Scilly	6.10	–5.86
Avon	6.38	–2.35
Bedfordshire	5.20	–3.72
Berkshire	7.19	–1.51
Buckinghamshire	7.67	–1.21
Cambridgeshire	6.33	–2.49
Cheshire	6.69	–2.99
Cleveland	2.42	–6.45
Cornwall	5.26	–3.85
Cumbria	5.23	–3.89
Derbyshire	6.23	–2.89
Devon	6.62	–2.46
Dorset	6.96	–2.28
Durham	5.44	–3.64
East Sussex	9.59	0.39
Essex	9.56	–0.17
Gloucestershire	6.07	–3.50
Hampshire	7.91	–0.95
Hereford and Worcester	6.68	–2.28
Hertfordshire	9.10	–0.83
Humberside	4.06	–5.42
Isle of Wight Council	7.53	–1.42
Kent	8.95	–0.51
Lancashire	3.99	–5.04
Leicestershire	4.43	–4.67
Lincolnshire	3.51	–5.86
Norfolk	5.14	–3.81
North Yorkshire	5.13	–4.36
Northamptonshire	4.38	–4.33
Northumberland	4.70	–4.67
Nottinghamshire	3.39	–5.66
Oxfordshire	7.55	–1.73
Shropshire	5.01	–4.13
Somerset	5.76	–2.12
Staffordshire	5.92	–3.51
Suffolk	5.42	–3.40
Surrey	9.30	0.96
Warwickshire	5.73	–3.17
West Sussex	9.41	–0.12
Wiltshire	4.82	–3.92
England	5.80	–3.27

TRANSPORT

New Driving Test

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance he plans to give to those bodies concerned with the design of vocational training material on the structure and content of the planned theory test associated with the new driving test which will help them in their planning.

Mr. Norris: Last year, the Driving Standards Agency produced guidance about learning to drive lorries for test candidates and their instructors published in the handbook "Your Large Goods Vehicle Driving Test". A companion book for bus and coach drivers will be published in March. The agency will revise this guidance when details of the new theory test have been decided.

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a detailed breakdown of amounts paid, estimated and contracted to be paid to all the contractors involved with the M11 link road; if he will list all the contractors and the amounts applicable to each of them; and if he will give a summary of the various purposes to which the amounts relate.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 13 January 1995:

Mr. Steven Norris has asked me to write in reply to your Parliamentary Question about payments to contractors for the A12 Hackney Wick to M11 Link Road since these are operational matters for the Highways Agency.

To date, contracts have been entered into in respect of only one of the four main civil engineering contracts and two of the principal subsidiary contracts.

The details are as follows:

Contract No. 4

Purpose: Construction of Link Road from Eastern Avenue to Green Man.

Contractors: Norwest Holst

Tender price £37.081m

Paid to date £12.000m

Estimated final cost £51.135m

Contract No. 1A

Purpose: Construction of Bridge over railway at Temple Mills, Leyton.

Contractor: Christiani and Neilsen

Tender price £2.291m

Paid to date £3.118m

Estimated final cost £3.397m

Contract No. 2B

Purpose: Advance drainage works.

Contractor: J Murphy & Sons Ltd

Tender price £4.141m

Paid to date £89,061m

Estimated final cost £8.323m

In addition, we have reimbursed London Underground, British Rail and statutory undertakers their costs, including those of employing contractors, for work on or diversion of their services made necessary by the Link Road.

These details are as follows:

Contract No. 2A

Purpose: Work to Railway Bridge No 230 at Dyers Hall Road.

SUs British Rail and London Underground.

Estimate £2.3m

Paid £2.69m

Estimated final cost £3.354m

We have paid £2.060m of a total estimate of £8.065m to London Underground and British Rail in respect of other works to their installations, and the other statutory undertakes (the providers of gas, water, electricity and telephone services) have received £4.947m of a total estimate of current work of £15.454m in connection with all the Link Road works except main contracts numbers 1 and 3.

A one-off contract was let to an completed by John Lelliott (E) Ltd for the refurbishment of accommodation in Leytonstone House Hospital so that patients could be relocated within the site, away from that part affected by the Link Road. The estimate for these works was £550.000 which is also the sum now paid.

We have three contractors who are paid at agreed rates for various works done such as demolition and securing property. £1.94m has been paid to date.

Lastly, we have spent £774,000 through various agents including local authorities on insulation of houses against traffic noise, that is the installation of secondary glazing of properties which qualify under the Noise Insulation Regulations.

Public Relations

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all current contracts placed by his Department with public relations companies and, in each case, state the aspect of the Department's work to which it relates, the company concerned and the estimated expenditure.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is as follows:

Aspect	*Company*	*Estimated expenditure*
Assistance in development of a PR Strategy for the Highways Agency	Biss Lancaster	£33,000

Public Transport

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what proportion of supplementary credit approval for local transport was apportioned to public transport in *(a)* England and Wales *(b)* Nottinghamshire in each of the last five years;

(2) what proportion of transport supplementary grant has been apportioned in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Nottinghamshire to public transport in each of the last five years;

(3) what proportion of the annual capital guidelines for public transport was apportioned to public transport in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Nottinghamshire in each of the last five years.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend allocates local transport resources for England only. The relevant figures for annual capital guidelines and supplementary credit approvals are as follows.

Transport supplementary grant is payable only on local authority expenditure in connection with highways or the regulation of traffic and not for public transport. Public transport expenditure is eligible for grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968, and figures for this are also given.

Resources for public transport expenditure are allocated in response to bids submitted by local authorities for particular investment schemes, and the allocation to individual authorities will vary from year to year depending on the bids submitted.

	1990–91 (£m)	*1991–92 (£m)*	*1992–93 (£m)*	*1993–94 (£m)*	*1994–95 (£m)*
Annual capital guidelines					
England: Total	411.29	416.95	389.81	327.14	433.03
Public transport	59.10	54.85	55.76	48.25	56.80
Nottinghamshire: Total	3.99	6.59	3.62	3.58	4.39
Public transport	–	–	–	–	–
Supplementary credit approvals					
England: Total	69.13	120.70	207.16	376.94	199.04
Public transport	21.00	32.50	33.78	73.78	47.74
Nottinghamshire: Total	0.16	1.03	2.33	3.98	6.39
Public transport	0.16	0.20	0.43	0.32	4.49
Section 56 grant (public transport only)					
England: Total	30.93	18.30	21.08	18.42	13.35
Nottinghamshire	–	–	–	–	[1] 2.55

[1] Estimated.

Leeds City Station (Information Board)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the electronic information board at Leeds City station went out of action; and when it will be repaired.

Mr. Watts: This is a matter for the station operator, Railtrack.

Agricultural Vehicles (Accidents)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each year since 1989 *(a)* the number of accidents involving a tractor or other agricultural machinery on public roads that were not licensed to travel on public roads and *(b)* the number of fatalities resulting from such accidents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Traffic Forecasting

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to revise his forecasting method in respect of the national traffic forecasts.

Mr. Watts: There are no immediate plans to revise the method, but it is kept under review.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Dr. Mawhinney: The respective responsibilities of Ministers and agency chief executives and the relationship between Ministers and agencies are set out in the framework document published for each of the Department's agencies.

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many parliamentary questions he has referred to next steps agencies in each year since 1992.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

1992–93 session — 4
1993–94 session — 130
1994–95 session — 55 (up to 12 January 1995).

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what minimum requirements in environmental matters have been imposed on bidders in the channel tunnel rail link competition.

Mr. Watts: I have today placed in the Library of the House a document setting out the environmental minimum requirements for the design and construction of the channel tunnel rail link.

Road Accidents (Alcohol)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for transport how many deaths in road traffic accidents were caused by alcohol in each of the last five years; and what breakdown by age is available.

Mr. Norris: The estimated number of fatalities in alcohol related road traffic accidents in the last five years is as follows:

1989 814
1990 758
1991 662
1992 662
1993 546 (provisional)

Information on the age of drivers and riders killed is given in table 11 of "Road Accidents Great Britain 1993", which is in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the cost to the NHS of treating injuries caused by road traffic accidents which in turn have been caused by alcohol.

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport highways economics note No. 1—September 1994, which is in the Library, provides the average medical and ambulance costs of road accident casualties, separately for fatalities, serious and slight injuries.

Large Vehicles (Accidents)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment is made by his Department of road accidents involving lorries or other articulated vehicles, with a view to improving safety on roads; what proposals he has to promote greater safety in construction and use regulations as they apply to lorries and other articulated vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Department monitors closely available data on all accidents, including those involving lorries or articulated vehicles. We would be prepared to take action to change the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 should it become apparent that changes are needed. We have no such plans at present.

Second Severn Crossing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest expected completion date of the second Severn crossing; and what new delays he has been informed of.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* I understand that the Severn River Crossing and its contractor are reviewing the programme for completion of the second crossing in spring 1996, following construction difficulties last year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Disused Coal Mines

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who will own mineral property and other rights in disused coal mines after privatisation; and who will authorise the opening.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The property in all the coal and coal mines in Great Britain previously owned by the British Coal Corporation is now vested in the Coal Authority. Anyone wishing to carry out coal mining operations will need a licence from the Coal Authority, which confers a statutory right to mine; together with a lease of, or other property interest in, the relevant coal. They will also need to obtain other rights and consents which are necessary for the carrying on of coal mining operations, such as planning permission, environmental consents and rights over surface land.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures his Department is taking to encourage the education and training of women for re-entry into the workplace; and what programmes are available to them.

Mr. Paice: Woman who wish to return to work can enter training for work, without having to be registered as unemployed for six months. They can train on a part-time basis and get child care support.

The Department is promoting training and employment opportunities for women through its fair play initiative.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures his Department is taking to encourage the education and training of 16 to 25-year-olds for entry into the workplace; and what programmes are available to them.

Mr. Paice: A wide range of measures is currently available to encourage the education and training of 16 to 25-year-olds for entry into the work place. These include the development of new vocational qualifications such as national vocational qualifications and general national vocational qualifications, training programmes such as youth training and training for work, and measures to enhance the vocational relevance of education, such as the enterprise in higher education initiative and the technical and vocational education initiative.

The "Competitiveness" White Paper published in May 1994 sets out additional measures which are being developed. These include modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships, improvements in independent careers advice for young people from the age of 13, the strengthening of education business links, and the creation of the competitiveness fund which is aimed at creating specialist education and training provision in further education colleges in key occupational areas.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stormont (Fire)

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) who is responsible for fire protection measures at Parliament buildings, Belfast;

(2) if he will order an independent and thorough inquiry into the fire at Parliament buildings, Belfast, on Monday 2 January and the relevant events surrounding it; and if he will open the inquiry to the public and release the findings;

(3) what fire sprinkler system was installed and operating in Parliament buildings, Belfast prior to Monday 2 January;

(4) what means were being relied upon to give early warning of a fire at Parliament buildings, Belfast on the morning of Monday 2 January;

(5) what assessment he has made of the suitability for the use or purpose for which they are provided of all Crown buildings which are his responsibility taking account of the means of escape in case of fire, the means of fighting fire and the means of providing warning in case of fire;

(6) what staff were present and at what times within Parliament buildings, Belfast over the Christmas 1994 and new year 1995 holidays;

(7) when Parliament buildings, Belfast was last evacuated as part of a fire drill;

(8) if he will review the Fire Service Northern Ireland Order 1984 with respect to Crown buildings to require them to apply for a fire certificate;

(9) what heat detection system was installed and operating in Parliament buildings, Belfast prior to Monday 2 January;

(10) if any early warning fire detection system incorporated in the refurbishment tender includes a link to a post outside Parliament buildings, Belfast, to cover times when the building is vacant;

(11) if there was a fire log book held for Parliament buildings, Belfast as required for certified buildings under the Fire Services Northern Ireland Order 1984;

(12) when engineers last tested the capacity of the water supply to meet demand for fire emergencies at Parliament buildings, Belfast;

(13) if he will order an independent and thorough inquiry into the operation of the fire section of the Department responsible for the safety of public buildings in Northern Ireland and if he will open such an inquiry to the public and release the findings;

(14) what smoke detection system was installed and operating in Parliament buildings, Belfast prior to Monday 2 January;

(15) what early fire warning device is to be installed in Parliament buildings, Belfast under the present renovations; and when his element was included in the contract;

(16) if there is a current fire certificate with respect to Parliament buildings, Belfast;

(17) when the last Fire Brigade trial run at Parliament buildings, Belfast was made to familiarise fire crews of the layout of the building and to ascertain what hazards might be encountered;

(18) if he expects an application to be submitted for a fire certificate as referred to in the Fire Service Northern Ireland Order 1984 in respect of Parliament buildings, Belfast, after the present renovations and repairs are completed.

Mr. Moss: My right hon. and learned Friend has already announced that he has asked Sir Reginald Doyle, a former HM chief inspector of fire services in Great Britain to conduct an inquiry into the fire at Parliament buildings on 2 January 1995.

Sir Reginald will examine the fire safety precautions and the fire fighting arrangements for Parliament buildings and make recommendations to the Secretary of State, both in relation to Parliament buildings itself and any consequential implications for other Crown buildings in Northern Ireland. It is intended to publish the report in due course. The matters referred to will be considered by Sir Reginald as part of his inquiry.

Water Consent Decisions

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the application for water consent at a waste disposal site by Mr. W. Ross of 11 Ballybeen road, Moneyreagh, Castlereagh was received; when a decision will be made; and if he will make a statement about the time being taken to issue water consent decisions.

Mr. Moss: An application for consent under the Water Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 was received by the Department of the Environment from Mr. W. Ross on 20 September 1994. Mr. Ross was asked to submit a location plan in support of his application and this was received on 24 November. Mr. Ross has not, however, forwarded proof that he has advertised the application as required by section 9(3) of the Water Act. As soon as this proof is received, the Department will make every effort to determine Mr. Ross's application as soon as possible.

NHS Contracts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total value of NHS contracts with non-NHS providers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moss: In Northern Ireland integrated health and personal social services are supplied by health boards, trusts, general practitioner fund holders and the Central

Services Agency for the Health and Personal Social Services. Their total expenditure on the purchase of health and personal social services from non-NHS/HPSS providers was as follows:

	£
1992–93	5,777,349
1993–94	4,554,933

(Note: these figures are still subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General).

The accounts of the health and social services boards were revised in 1992–93 to take account of the separation of the purchaser-provider functions. Consequently, the financial information given is not readily available prior to this date.

Health and social services trusts and general practitioner fund-holders were established in Northern Ireland with effect from 1 April 1993, and therefore the figures for 1992–93 relate exclusively to health boards' expenditure.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the value of NHS contracts placed with non-NHS providers *(a)* in total, *(b)* by health board area, *(c)* by fundholding general practice and *(d)* by trust.

Mr. Moss: In Northern Ireland integrated health and personal social services are purchased by health boards, trusts, general practitioner fund-holders and the Central Services Agency for the health and personal social services. Their expenditure on the purchase of health and personal social services from non-NHS/HPSS providers was as follows:

	1992–93 £	*1993–94* £
Northern Health and Social Services Board	377,056	279,013
Southern Health and Social Services Board	159,871	172,350
Eastern Health and Social Services Board	4,876,322	3,177,081
Western Health and Social Services Board	364,100	820,278
Health and Social Services Trusts	—	Nil
General Practitioner Fundholders	—	106,211
Total	5,777,349	4,554,933

Note:
The first general practitioner fund-holders and the first health and social services trusts were established in Northern Ireland on 1 April 1993.

Health Education Authority

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to change the funding structure or remit of the Health Education Authority.

Mr. Moss: None. This is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. However, I am presently in the process of reviewing health promotion arrangements in Northern Ireland. The review is examining the respective roles and responsibilities of the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland, health and social services boards and trusts and will aim to set in place the most effective structures for delivering health promotion in Northern Ireland. I hope to receive the report of the review in the near future.

Private Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many private in-patients and out-patients were treated in NHS hospitals; and what was the total income earned from private patients in each of the last five years, and by health authority.

Mr. Moss: I refer the right hon. Member to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *405–6*.

NHS Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many NHS beds were available in each year since 1978, and for each area of Northern Ireland, in total and by specialty of *(a)* acute, *(b)* intensive care, *(c)* long-term care or geriatric, *(d)* maternity, *(e)* paediatric, *(f)* psychiatric and *(g)* casualty.

Mr. Moss: Information is not readily available for the period asked nor in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Available information is given in the table.

Year	*Acute*	*Non-acute*	*Total*
1983	7,040	9,936	16,976
1984	6,934	9,781	16,715
1985	6,960	9,635	16,595
1986	6,479	9,483	15,962
1987	6,223	9,188	15,411
1988–89	5,931	8,755	14,686
1989–90	5,678	8,476	14,154
1990–91	5,463	8,025	13,488
1991–92	5,268	7,332	12,600
1992–93	5,112	6,600	11,712
1993–94	4,872	6,018	10,890

Intensive care, paediatrics, and casualty beds are included in the acute bed numbers. Non-acute comprise geriatrics (geriatric medicine and old age psychiatry, maternity (obstetrics, GP maternity, sick babies and well babies specialties), psychiatric (mental illness, child and adolescent psychiatric, psychotherapy and forensic psychiatry) and mental handicap beds.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients were waiting for hospital treatment in January 1995; and how many were waiting in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moss: Information about the total number of patients waiting for treatment in January 1995 is not yet available. The latest available information is for September 1994 and the table shows the number waiting then and at the end of September in each of the previous four years.

Date	*Ordinary admissions*	*Day cases*
September 1994	22,728	12,076
September 1993	25,420	not available
September 1992	25,977	not available
September 1991	27,481	not available
September 1990	26,707	not available

Health Services (Privatisation)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what NHS services have been privatised and which have been market tested since April 1991.

Mr. Moss: None of the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland have been privatised. Since April 1991, in addition to the main "hotel" services of catering, domestic and laundry, which have been market tested throughout the HPSS, a range of other support services have been market tested within a number of boards and trusts. These were: window cleaning, pest control, grounds maintenance, security, courier, printing, office systems, transport and vehicle maintenance.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Ostriches

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *521*, what regulations allow the slaughter of ostriches on farms; if these regulations allow for slaughter for commercial sale; and what method of slaughter of ostriches on farms are permitted.

Mrs. Browning: The slaughter of ostriches on farms is permitted by the Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1994. These regulations provide for premises slaughtering less than 10,000 birds a year to be exempt from the licensing and detailed hygiene and inspection requirements. Meat produced under this exemption can be sold for human consumption subject to certain restrictions on distance and end-user. The on-farm operation remains subject to the terms of the Food Safety Act and general food hygiene legislation made thereunder.

Current animal welfare legislation does not stipulate slaughter methods for ostriches on farms. The EC legislation to be implemented this year will permit stunning of animals, including birds, by means of a captive bolt, concussion stunner or electronarcosis to be followed as soon as possible by bleeding.

WALES

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of independent schools operating in Wales for each financial year since 1975.

Mr. Richards: The number of independent schools in Wales for each year since 1975 are given as follows:

Year	*Number*
1994	64
1993	65
1992	68
1991	71
1990	67
1989	66
1988	67
1987	69
1986	69
1985	67
1984	70
1983	73
1982	71
1981	72
1980	68
1979	68
1978	64
1977	67
1976	68
1975	67

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of the operation of the assisted places scheme in ensuring the continued operation of the independent schools sector.

Mr. Richards: None. The scheme is intended to widen parental choice when selecting appropriate education for their children.

There are some 10,788 pupils in independent schools in Wales, of whom approximately 6.6 per cent.—714—were in the assisted places scheme, as at September 1994.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the average household income of the pupils applying for assistance under the assisted places scheme; and what is the average household income of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Richards: Incomes of households are variable and we have made no direct and separate assessment of the average household income of the pupils applying for assistance under the scheme in Wales. Some 714 pupils are currently receiving education at one of the participating schools in Wales; approximately 41 per cent. of parents pay no contribution to fees.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently employed by each of the Welsh training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested by the hon. Member is shown in the following table. The figures are taken from the 1993-94 published annual accounts of the Welsh training and enterprise councils.

Name of TEC	*Number of employees*
Gwent	69
Mid Glamorgan	94
North East Wales	110
Targed	68
Powys	23
South Glamorgan	60
West Wales	124
Total	548

NHS Services (Privatisation)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what NHS services have been privatised and which have been market tested since April 1991.

Mr. Richards: No NHS services have been privatised within Wales.

A list covering the range of NHS services which have been market tested since April 1991 is as follows:

NHS Wales services market tested since April 1991

Service	*Service*
Agency Staffing	Medical Gases
Audit	Medical Records
Banking Services	Non-Emergency Patient Transport
Blood Culture Management	Non-Emergency Transport—other
Building Maintenance	Painting
Car Parks	Pathology
Catering	Patient Activity Monitoring
Cervical Cytology Laboratory Tests	Patient Hair Dressing Service
Computer Maintenance	Patient Shop
Courier/Delivery Services	Payroll Services
Data Processing	Personnel Records
Dental Services	Pest Control
Design Services	Pharmacy
Domestic Cleaning	Portable Appliance Testing
Engineering Maintenance	Portering
Equipment Maintenance	Public Relations
Estates Management	Recruitment
Grounds and Gardens	Removal and Storage of Furniture
Health and Safety Statutory Compliance	Secretarial/Clerical Services
Heat and Power	Security
Hotel Services	Staff Residential Accommodation
Housekeeping	Sterile Supplies
Hygiene Services	Steriliser Testing
Insurance	Telephone Systems
Laundry and Linen Services	Theatre Services
Legal Services	Training
Lift Maintenance	Transport Hire
Lithotripsy	Transport Maintenance
Management Consultancy	Waste Disposal: Clinical, General
Mechanical and Electrical Maintenance	Window Cleaning

Acorns Nurseries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *50*, if he will list the breaches of contract by Acorns Nurseries with respect to *(a)* staffing, *(b)* quality of child care, *(c)* health and hygiene, (d) financial management and *(e)* nursery equipment.

Mr. Redwood: Because legal proceedings are being considered I cannot add to my answer of 10 January.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients were waiting for hospital treatment in each of the last five years.

Mr. Richards: The number of patients waiting for in-patient or day case treatment at hospitals in Wales, at 30 September in each of the last five years, was as follows:

	Waiting for in-patient treatment	*Waiting for day case treatment*	*Total*
1990	49,235	7,441	56,676
1991	52,461	10,970	63,431
1992	44,014	12,741	56,755
1993	40,316	13,358	53,674
1994[1]	42,774	16,640	59,414

[1] Provisional.

NHS Contracts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the value of NHS contracts placed with non-NHS providers *(a)* in total, *(b)* by health authority, *(c)* by each general practitioner fund holding practice and *(d)* by each trust.

Mr. Richards: Information about the value of NHS contracts placed with non-NHS providers is not available centrally. However, the amount spent in 1993–94 on health care purchases from non-NHS providers by health authorities, general practitioner fund-holding practices—on an aggregated basis—and by NHS trusts, is shown in the following table.

Health authority	*1993–94 £000*
Clwyd	944
East Dyfed	611
Gwent	5,444
Gwynedd	819
Mid Glamorgan	1,695
Pembrokeshire	207
Powys	173
South Glamorgan	1,225
West Glamorgan	143
General practitioner fundholding practice aggregate (by Family Health Services Authority)	
Clwyd	71
Dyfed	18
Gwent	233
Gwynedd	0
Mid Glamorgan	139
Powys	52
South Glamorgan	2
West Glamorgan	142
NHS Trust	
Bridgend and District	0
Carmarthen and District	20
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	0
Clwydian	798
Glan Clwyd	0
Glan Hafren	5
Gwent Community Health	751
Llandough Hospital	0
Llanelli Dinefwr	1,085
Pembrokeshire	29
Powys Healthcare	0

Health authority	1993–94 £000
South East Wales Ambulance Trust	0
Swansea	0
Wrexham Maelor	0
Total	14,606

Source:
Health authorities and GP fund-holding accounts, NHS trust financial returns.
Notes:
(i) 1993–94 figures are provisional.
(ii) Information is not held centrally in respect of individual GP fund-holding practices but is shown on an aggregated basis in the annual accounts of family health services authorities. This expenditure represents GP fund-holders purchases of hospital services paid by the family health services authorities on behalf of GP fund-holders.

Health Education Authority

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans she has to change the funding structure or remit of the Health Education Authority.

Mr. Richards: The funding structure and remit of the Health Education Authority are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I am however currently undertaking a review of health promotion in Wales which includes the role of the Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

NHS Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital NHS beds in each year since 1978, and for each area of Wales, were available in *(a)* total *(b)* acute patients, *(c)* intensive care, *(d)* long-term care (geriatric), *(e)* maternity *(f)* paediatric, *(g)* psychiatric and *(h)* casualty.

Mr. Richards: In view of the volume of data requested I will write to the hon. Lady and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Departmental Nursery, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 January *Official Report*, column *50*, if he will specify the essential remedial work requiring to be carried out at the Welsh Office/civil service nursery, Gabalfa, Cardiff before the reopening of the nursery.

Mr. Redwood: Necessary remedial work specified in an environmental health officer's report is: replacement of kitchen equipment including freezer, sink unit and associated cupboards and work surfaces; upgrading of ventilation system and cooker hood; safe and secure storage of cleaning fluids; safe and secure storage of medicines; thorough cleaning of equipment in particular the kitchen equipment, milk preparation areas, seating areas and floors.

Countryside Council for Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the finance, management and policy review his Department undertook of the Countryside Council for Wales in 1994.

Mr. Redwood: The financial management policy review of the Countryside Council for Wales has been overtaken by the review of the council's functions which I announced in response to the question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) on 3 November, *Official Report*, column *1329*. I am pursuing this in discussions with the Countryside Council for Wales and I will publish my conclusions in due course.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

NHS Institutions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the estimated time scale for the report of the study commissioned from English Heritage reviewing the listing of NHS institutions.

Mr. Dorrell: The work on the study is due to be completed in the summer of this year. English Heritage's recommendations will be considered by the historic hospitals working group and then submitted to the Department of National Heritage.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make available in the Library the guidance for national health service managers in respect of listed buildings.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health will place a copy of the guidance in the Library when it is published.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Escapes

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners serving sentences have been unlawfully at large, in each month in the last five years having *(a)* escaped from prisons, *(b)* escaped from escort and *(c)* failed to return from authorised temporary release.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. A. J. Beith, dated 13 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about prisoners serving sentences who have been, or who still are, unlawfully at large.

I am afraid that the information requested is not readily available centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The current information system used by the Prison Service Intelligence and Incident Support Unit only dates back to June 1988 and became fully operational in October 1990. It records information on all incidents in which prisoners became unlawfully at large.

These include escapes from establishments or escorts, home leave or temporary release failures and absconds. Details of recaptures are also recorded, although it is not always recorded whether the return to custody was voluntary, or whether the prisoner was reapprehended by the police or other agencies of the law.

The system does not link, however, the recapture with the type of escape, abscond or failure to return. Such information would have to be obtained manually and would involve checking a large number of records entered since the system became operational.

A new information system is being developed, which is expected to be operational by the summer of next year. It will not, however, be able to provide the retrospective data you request.

Prisoners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of prisoners were serving sentences for violent offences at the latest available date at *(a)* Doncaster prison, *(b)* The Wolds prison *(c)* New Hall, Wakefield prison and *(d)* the female wing at Durham prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. A. J. Beith, dated 13 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the proportion of prisoners serving sentences for violent offences at Doncaster, the Wolds, New Hall, and the female wing at Durham prison.

The most recent information is in the attached tables. The national information for males and females is also shown. New Hall and Durham (female) hold relatively high proportions of prisoners with long sentences associated with violent offences.

Table 1: Percentage of prisoners under sentence for violent offences [1] at Doncaster, The Wolds, New Hall and Durham (female): 30 November 1994

Prison establishment	Percentage[2] under sentence for violent offences			
	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Total[3]
Doncaster	19	5	9	34
The Wolds	21	8	11	39
New Hall	44	—	8	52
Durham (female)	61	—	10	71

[1] Violent offences covers offences of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.
[2] Prisoners for whom an offence is not recorded and fine defaulters are excluded from the calculation.
[3] Components may not add to totals as they have been rounded independently.

Table 2: Percentage of prisoners under sentence for violent offences [1] in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales: 30 November 1994.

Prison establishment	Percentage[2] under sentence for violent offences			
	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Total
Male	24	10	16	50
Female	24	1	8	33

[1] Violent offences covers offences of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.
[2] Prisoners for whom an offence is not recorded and fine defaulters are excluded from the calculation.

Percentage of prisoners under sentence for violent offences[1]: 30 November 1994

Prison establishment	Percentage[2] under sentence for violent offences
Doncaster	34
The Wolds	39
New Hall	52
Durham (female)	71

[1] Violent offences covers offences of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery.
[2] Prisoners for whom an offence is not recorded and fine defaulters are excluded from the calculation.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of *(a)* remand and *(b)* sentenced prisoners held at (i) Doncaster prison, (ii) The Wolds prison, (iii) New Hall, Wakefield and (iv) the female wing of Durham prison were aged (1) 16 years and under, (2) 17 to 21 years inclusive, (3) 22 to 24 years inclusive and (4) over 24 years at the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arranged for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 13 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for a percentage breakdown by age of the remand and sentenced populations at the prisons: Doncaster, the Wolds, New Hall and Durham female prison.

The most recent information is in the attached table.

Percentage of prisoners by age: 30 November 1994
(a) Remand prisoners

Prison establishment	Percentage in age band 16 and under	17 to 21[1]	22 to 24	Over 24
Doncaster	5	53	12	30
The Wolds	0	7	28	65
New Hall	0	26	17	57
Durham (female)	0	10	27	64

(b) Sentenced prisoners

Prison establishment	as Percentage in age band 16 and under	17 to 21[1]	22 to 24	Over 24
Doncaster	3	43	12	42
The Wolds	0	6	24	70
New Hall	4	23	13	60
Durham (female)	0	16	10	74

[1] Includes some adult prisoners aged 21.

Note:

The percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

The higher percentage of 17 to 21 year olds at Doncaster reflects the function of the establishment in holding young remand prisoners and young offenders awaiting allocation.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were being detained and what was the total capacity of each prison in the north-west at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Robert Parry, dated 13 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners being detained and the total capacity of each prison in the north west at the latest available date.

The information as at 30 December 1994 is as below:

Establishment	Operational capacity	Population
Garth	512	511
Haverigg	394	335
Hindley	319	224
Kirkham	644	402
Lancaster	246	230
Lancaster Farms	364	317
Liverpool	1,267	1,203
Manchester	969	881
Preston	536	469
Risley	753	728
Styal	280	243
Thorn Cross	209	121
Wymott	432	425
Total	6,925	6,089

Operational capacity is the total number of prisoners which an establishment can hold without serious risk to good order, security and the proper running of the planned regime.

Immigration

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of whether the complexity of the applications for leave to remain made to his Department over the past year has increased in comparison with applications made in the preceding year.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have no reason to believe that, within any individual immigration category, applications for leave to remain have become more complex.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the percentage increase of numbers of applications for leave to remain to his Department excluding asylum applications from 1990 to 1991, 1991 to 1992, 1992 to 1993 and 1993 to 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The figures which are available on applications include some dependants who cannot be separately identified at that stage and are therefore not consistent from year to year. The percentage changes of decisions taken on principal applicants are given in the table.

Decisions on applications for leave to remain excluding asylum applications

Year of decision	percentage change
1990–1991	+4.0
1991–1992	–0.3
1992–1993	+0.3
1993–1994[1]	–0.1

[1] Provisionals

Demonstrations, Shoreham

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Sussex as to the identifiability of the uniformed police officers at the demonstrations at Shoreham; and what complaint has been made by Mrs. Baker-Smith about police conduct at the demonstration.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I understand that in accordance with force policy, all officers displayed their identification number on their uniforms during the demonstrations at Shoreham. At the outset of the demonstration concerns were expressed that the fluorescent jackets which officers were wearing for safety reasons could, in some cases, have the effect of obscuring their identification numbers. Officers were, therefore, briefed to ensure that epaulettes showing their numbers were attached to the fluorescent jackets.

Neither I nor the chief constable of Sussex police is aware of any complaint made by Mrs. Baker-Smith.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the report of the Inter-agency Committee on Domestic Violence.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The ministerial group on domestic violence has no plans to publish a report, but intends to issue, early this year, an inter-agency circular which will encourage local statutory and voluntary agencies to work in concert to provide help and support to those suffering domestic violence and to develop preventative strategies.

National Lottery

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a definite date for the appointment of a chief executive of the National Lotteries Board; when charities will be given the opportunity to apply for funds; and what process will be used to decide on distribution.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: These are all matters for the National Lottery Charities Board. The board announced on 20 December the appointment, as its chief executive, of Mr. Timothy Hornsby, currently chief executive of the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames.

I understand that he will be taking up post at the end of March.

Prison Security

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what recent directions he has given to the Director General of Her Majesty's Prison Service concerning security in the north-west; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the security situation in prisons in the north-west.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 January 1995]:* The Secretary of State and the Director General of the Prison Service have made it clear that security in all prisons is of the utmost importance and that security instructions must be assiduously followed. These instructions apply to prisons in the north-west as they do elsewhere in the prison system.

The Secretary of State has accepted the recommendations of the report of Sir John Woodcock into the escape of prisoners from Whitemoor and these will be implemented, where appropriate, throughout England and Wales.

The results of the internal inquiry into the escapes from Parkhurst will be carefully studied by General Sir John Learnmont, whom the Secretary of State has asked to review security and security procedures in the Prison Service.

Prison Staff

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent negotiations he has had with the Prison Officers Association concerning staffing levels in Her Majesty's prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Robert Parry, dated 13 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about negotiations with the Prison Officers' Association on staffing levels.

The Home Secretary has had no negotiations with the Prison Officers' Association on staffing levels in Her Majesty's Prisons. The utilisation of staff resources within the Service is a matter for me.

In practice, the staffing requirements of individual prisons are determined by governors in consultation with local trade unions including, in the case of prison officer grades, the local Branch of the Prison Officers' Association. Such consultations take place whenever there are proposals to change staffing numbers or grades. Across the Service as a whole these consultations are frequent and a normal feature of industrial relations.

Where there is a failure to agree on these local issues the Industrial Relations Procedural Agreement with the POA comes into operation to assist in the resolution of this matter.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those local authorities which have submitted applications for financial assistance under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for the year 1995–96 and the total value of each application submitted; if he will list applications which were excluded because they were received out of time; what is the total amount of grant available for distribution under section 11; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The authorities listed in the table have submitted applications, in the main for two or three years, indicating a requirement in relation to 1995–96 for the level of section 11 grant shown. To date, no such application has been excluded as out of time, following the announcement by my right hon. and learned Friend on 22 November, *Official Report,* column *64* that the amount of funding on offer was being doubled, it is expected that grant allocations of around £30 million will be made to authorities and other eligible bodies in respect of 1995–96.

Authority	*Numbers of projects applied for*	*Amount of funding sought (£)*
Avon	4	584,488
Barking and Dagenham	2	265,750
Barnet	4	221,000
Bedfordshire	4	93,200
Berkshire	2	19,500
Bexley	4	49,261
Birmingham	6	487,636
Bolton	11	217,411
Bradford	8	3,723,014
Brent	19	775,500
Bromley	2	37,800
Buckinghamshire	5	1,138,021
Burnley	3	50,603
Bury	3	35,940
Calderdale	1	74,250
Cambridgeshire	8	185,000
Camden	17	1,506,763
Cardiff	3	24,093
Cleveland	6	180,056
Clwyd	1	139,968
Coventry	2	165,355
Crewe and Nantwich	1	35,627
Croydon	4	427,174
Derbyshire	7	347,176
Devon	1	83,000
Doncaster	4	54,654
Dorset	1	45,700
Dudley	3	811,318
Ealing	16	1,242,773
East Sussex	5	88,480
Enfield	13	561,647
Essex	3	113,716
Gateshead	1	27,000
Gloucester	1	49,160
Gloucestershire	4	83,608
Greenwich	5	1,043,000
Gwent	2	184,000

Authority	Numbers of projects applied for	Amount of funding sought (£)
Hackney	7	531,692
Hammersmith and Fulham	7	488,876
Hampshire	1	66,750
Haringey	7	357,258
Harrow	1	26,989
Havering	1	35,484
Hereford and Worcester	2	175,500
Hertfordshire	1	29,000
Hillingdon	10	205,650
Hounslow	11	653,700
Humberside	3	127,480
Hyndburn	2	30,500
Islington	9	1,590,701
Kensington and Chelsea	1	175,370
Kent	1	172,600
Kingston	3	53,604
Kirklees	11	2,207,312
Lambeth	5	1,649,969
Lancashire	13	1,214,630
Leeds	24	880,686
Leicester	7	148,420
Leicestershire	6	234,083
Lewisham	9	1,527,759
Lincolnshire	1	18,437
Liverpool	3	163,855
London Boroughs Grants Committee	1	22,210
Luton	4	136,004
Manchester	4	240,970
Merton	4	147,570
Middlesbrough	6	74,829
Milton Keynes	4	52,725
Newcastle	2	19,670
Newham	17	624,605
Norfolk	4	217,051
Northamptonshire	8	293,846
North Tyneside	4	33,513
Nottingham	4	80,000
Nottinghamshire	11	729,500
Oldham	6	207,500
Oxford	1	14,856
Oxfordshire	4	174,000
Peterborough	2	18,488
Portsmouth	7	93,830
Preston	2	23,9[illegible]
Reading	5	25,7[illegible]
Redbridge	13	323,[illegible]
Redditch	3	13,[illegible]56
Richmond	3	25,200
Rochdale	3	97,000
Rotherham	4	393,384
St. Albans	1	27,770
St. Helens	1	20,064
Salford	1	99,110
Sandwell	11	494,395
Scunthorpe	1	19,750
Sefton	1	24,165
Sheffield	19	763,500
Shropshire	4	124,884
Somerset	1	34,273
Southampton	3	47,110
South Glamorgan	3	91,943
South Tyneside	4	168,000
South Yorkshire FCDA	1	12,194
Southwark	10	939,453
Staffordshire	6	320,000
Suffolk	3	40,100
Sunderland	1	52,920
Surrey	2	47,985
Sutton	3	126,343
Tameside	8	160,481
Tower Hamlets	12	1,198,519
Trafford	3	61,959
Wakefield	4	265,000
Walsall	15	1,462,469
Waltham Forest	6	290,749
Wandsworth	8	220,536
Warwickshire	3	863,500
West Glamorgan	1	237,244
West Midlands FCDA	1	53,250
Westminster	6	270,821
West Sussex	1	Not stated
West Yorkshire FCDA	1	50,586
Wigan	1	80,000
Wiltshire	3	67,600
Wirral	1	54,300
Woking	6	35,513
Wolverhampton	8	1,323,600

SOCIAL SECURITY

Annual Upratings

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will resume the practice of publishing full details of annual upratings in the *Official Report.*

Mr. Hague: Extensive tabular material is not normally printed in the *Official Report,* but is instead placed in the Library. We were informed by the *Official Report* at the time of the uprating that it was not possible to print the uprating schedule. I have, however, now been advised that in future the material referred to by the hon. Member will be printed in the *Official Report.*

Disabled People

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which HIV-AIDS organisations were specifically invited to participate in the consultation on Government measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Hague: Over 100,000 copies of the consultation document "Disability on the Agenda" were distributed, in various formats. In addition, a meeting was held with the Terrence Higgins Trust to discuss the consultation document.

A total of 1,100 responses were received, including one from the Terrence Higgins Trust; and a number from other HIV-AIDS organisations such as the UK Forum on HIV and Human Rights; National Network of Body Positive Groups; the AIDS and Housing Project; Scottish AIDS Monitor and the Cambridge AIDS helpline.

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parliamentary questions he has referred to chief executives of next steps agencies in each year since 1992.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

Parliamentary questions referred to chief executives

Year[1]	*Total questions received*	*Number answered by chief executives*
1992–93	3,781	58
1993–94	2,691	423
1994–95[2]	609	73

Notes:
[1] Figures are for parliamentary sessions.
[2] Figures are shown as at 11 January 1995.
Source:
DSS Private Office Database.

HEALTH

GPs' Lists

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been removed from general practitioners' lists in each of the last three years in *(a)* Nottinghamshire and *(b)* Nottingham.

Mr. Malone: The information requested is available only by family health services authority area and is included in the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1269*.

Salaries

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the salary of *(a)* the chairman of the Health Commission, *(b)* the chairman of the family health services authority and *(c)* the chairman of the district health authority in Sunderland.

Mr. Malone: Chairmen of district health authorities are remunerated annually within the range of £15,125 to £19,285 according to the authority's revenue budget. Chairmen of family health services authorities are remunerated annually within the range £10,845 to £12,605 according to population size.

A commissioning agency is not a separate legal entity and exists only as a managerial arrangement on the part of the statutory authorities concerned. The chairman of Sunderland district health authority acts as chairman of the commissioning agency.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals and trusts hold their meetings in private in the Northern region; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: National health service trusts are required to hold at least one public meeting each year and many arrange other public meetings.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cards advertising the St. Bartholomew's hospital walk-in minor injuries unit have been produced by the Royal Hospitals NHS trust; in which areas of London, by postal district, they are being distributed to households; and what is the total cost of production and distribution of the cards.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the Royal Hospitals national health service trust, for details.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters she has received in the last two years against closure or partial closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital; and how many letters she received in favour of closure.

Mr. Malone: Figures are not available.

Psychiatric Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average daily cost of treating a patient with a psychiatric illness *(a)* in an NHS bed and *(b)* in a private bed.

Mr. Bowis: The provisional average daily cost per patient for psychiatric specialities in the national health service in 1993–94" was £119.95. NHS returns do not separately identify expenditure incurred specifically on the purchase of care outside the NHS.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were treated for psychiatric illnesses in *(a)* NHS and *(b)* private hospitals in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis: The number of finished national health service consultant episodes in the psychiatric specialities during the last five years is published in the Department of Health statistical bulletin "NHS hospital activity statistics: England 1983 to 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on numbers of patients in private hospitals is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average length of stay of a patient with a psychiatric illness *(a)* in a NHS bed and *(b)* in a private bed.

Mr. Bowis: The average length of stay in the national health service in England in the psychiatric specialties was 95 days in 1992–93. Information is not available centrally on cases treated in beds specifically designated as private.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric beds there were in NHS hospitals in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Bowis: This information is in the Department of Health statistical bulletins, "NHS Hospital Activity Statistics: England 1983 to 1993–94" and "NHS Hospital Activity Statistics: England 1982 to 1992–93", copies of which are available in the Library.

Prescription Charges

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to raise prescription charges.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on 16 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1144*.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of prescriptions costs the NHS less than *(a)* £5.25, *(b)* £5 and *(c)* £4.75.

Mr. Malone: The latest information is shown in the table.

Percentage of total prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors, and prescription items personally administered by prescribing doctors, in England in 1993 which had a total cost of less than £5.25, £5.00 and £4.75.

Total cost[1] per prescription item	*Percentage of total prescription items[2] per cent.*
under £5.25	57
under £5.00	55
under £4.75	54

[1] Total cost = the net ingredient cost of drugs and appliances, less discount, plus dispensing fees, container cost, oncost allowance, oxygen payments and value added tax.

[2] Total prescriptions items includes items dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors in England on prescriptions written by general medical practitioners, hospital doctors, dentists and armed services doctors and dentists in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. Items dispensed in hospitals are not included.

Market Testing

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many functions of the NHS executive and Department of Health, London, have been market tested; how many have already been privatised; and how many will be privatised.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health and its agencies have market tested 30 activities under the Government's "Competing for Quality" programme. There have been no privatisations to date. Following a review of the NHS Estates agency, it is the intention now to conduct an enabling study beginning April 1996 with a view to completing privatisation of that part of its work that does not need to be kept in the public sector by the end of that financial year.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what NHS services have been market tested since April 1991.

Mr. Sackville: The range of services market tested up to 31 March 1993, the latest date for which information is available, or were planned to be market tested in 1993–94 is shown in the table under main service headings.

Service	*Service*	*Service*
Administration, Information and Financial		
Personnel Services	Advertising and recruitment	Banking
Legal	Consultancy	Insurance
Clerical and secretarial	Management services	Payroll
Agency staffing	Computer services	Audit
Education and training	Micro-filming	Accounts and bookkeeping
Press and public relations		Printing and stationery
Estates, Building and Engineering		
Estates management	Building and works maintenance	Engineering
Energy Management	Flooring	Fire Systems
Grounds and garden	Glazing	Gas Supply
Car parks	Painting	Electrical
Supplies	Design	Water and sewerage
	Equipment systems maintenance	Waste disposal
Hotel and Non-Clinical Support Services		
Hotel services	Catering	Crèche
Facilities management	Domestic services	Leisure services
Environmental Health management	Laundry and linen	Photography
Ward housekeeping	Portering	Funeral services
Switchboard/Reception	Transport	Pest control
	Security	Courier services
Clinical and Clinical Support		
Anaesthetics	Bio-Engineering	
Chiropody	Clinical coding	CSSD*
Continuing Care services (elderly)	Haematology	HSDU*
Infection control	IVF Services*	Lithotripsy
Medical physics	Medical photography	Mobility provision
Magnetic Resonance Imaging	Nuclear medicine	Opthalmology
Occupational health	Occupational therapy	Orthoptics
Oxygen Therapy Units	Patient appliances	Pharmacy
Laboratory services	Speech therapy	Incontinence services
Physiotherapy	Home renal dialysis	Radiology
Termination of pregnancy		

1. There is no standard definition of services or list of services within the NHS and those listed above relate to health authority provider units' interpretation.

2. The services listed are those recorded from either health authority and NHS trust returns (already tested) or annual reports (plans to test).

3. Service headings such as "Hotel Services" and "Facilities Management" include a wide and varying range of individual services e.g. catering, portering, security car parking. Again there is no set pattern of which services make up hotel services etc., but relates to individual provider units' interpretation.

4. * CSSD = central sterile supply department, HSDU = hospital sterilizing and disinfecting unit, IVF = in-vitro fertilisation.

GP Fundholders

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the ratio between the administrative cost borne by family health services authorities in relation to non-fundholding practices and fundholding practices; and what administrative duties are performed by the FHSAs for non-fundholding practices which are not performed for fundholding practices.

Mr. Malone: Family health services authority administrative costs are not disaggregated between non-fundholding and fundholding practices. In relation to the provision of general medical services, FHSAs perform the same administrative duties for all general practitioners, non-fundholders and fundholders alike.

District health authorities perform fewer duties for fundholding practices, because those practices purchase for themselves some health services hitherto purchased entirely by DHAs for all GPs.

Health Service Demand

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what projections her Department has for the demand for health services, as a percentage of gross net product, by the year 2000.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is not aware of any well-founded and comprehensive projections.

NHS Expenditure

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the underspend on the NHS in each year from 1989 to 1994; and what is the projected underspend for 1994–95.

Mr. Sackville: During this period, the only year in which Government spending on the national health service in England was less than originally planned was 1993–94. In that year, expenditure of £28,965 million, was £69 million or 0.2 per cent. below the original plan. We do not anticipate that spending will be less than planned provision for the NHS in 1994–95.

Smoking-related Illnesses

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of smoking-related illnesses in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Treatment costs to the national health service are not available on a year-by-year basis. The Health Education Authority's 1993 report, "The Smoking Epidemic—A prescription for Change'', provides the most recent estimate. Copies are available in the Library.

Burns

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS for treating burns in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available in the form and for the years requested.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of burns are caused by smoking.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Alcohol-related Illnesses

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the NHS of treating alcohol-related illnesses in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

However, "Health Update 3," published by the Health Education Authority in 1993, copies of which are available in the Library, estimated the costs to the national health service of alcohol misuse at £149.35 million at 1990 prices.

Alcohol-related Accidents

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated by the NHS, in each of the last five years, for injuries caused by road traffic accidents caused by alcohol.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available from national health service records. Estimates of casualties as a result of accidents involving illegal alcohol levels is contained in table 1m of "Road Accidents Great Britain 1993" copies of which are available in the Library.

Drug Prescriptions

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give any figures she has on the potential annual savings to the national health service on the general practitioner drug budget if 50, 60, 70 and 80 per cent. of drugs were prescribed generically.

Mr. Malone: A total of 51 per cent. of all items prescribed by general practitioners are already prescribed in their generic form. No reliable estimate can be made of the savings which higher levels of generic prescribing might realise as savings depend on the differentials between the prices of branded and generic products which vary from item to item.

Calman Report

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on implementing the recommendations of the Calman report.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 27 October 1994, *Official Report,* column *821.* Since then, further substantial progress has been made with the medical profession through several working groups. The report of the unified training grade working party will be issued for consultation on 17 January. The reports of the working groups on the implications of the Calman report on general practice, overseas doctors and academic and research medicine will be issued for consultation soon, together with details of our proposals for the necessary legislative changes. The first meeting of the new advisory group on medical education, training and staffing was held on 7 December.

NHS Executive

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were relocated from London to NHS executive headquarters in Leeds in the past three years; and what was the total cost of relocation expenses paid.

Mr. Sackville: A total of 482 staff in the national health service executive and 40 in the NHS Estates agency relocated to Leeds on permanent transfer terms. £11.76 million was paid in relocation expenses.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the 200 staff to be made redundant at the NHSE headquarters in Leeds were relocated to Leeds in the previous three years; and what are the estimate severance and redundancy payments to these staff.

Mr. Sackville: It is the intention to reduce staff in the national health service executive by around 200 by 1 April 1997. We hope to avoid any compulsory redundancies through early retirement and natural wastage. I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 29 November 1994, *Official Report,* column *586.*

NHS Targets

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets she has set in the last three years which have not been achieved.

Mr. Sackville: Reports on progress against the Secretary of State's priorities and key challenges are published yearly in the Department of Health and in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys's departmental report. Reports on 1992–93 are contained in Cm 2212 published in February 1993; reports on 1993–94 are contained in Cm 2512 published in March 1994; and reports on 1994–95 will be contained in the departmental report to be published around March.

Progress against objectives made by the Department's agencies is set out in the agencies' own annual reports.

Reports on the targets in the patients charter were contained in the national health service performance tables published on 29 June 1994. There will be a new set this summer. Information on NHS performance is also contained in the NHS annual reports for 1992–93 and 1993–94.

A report on progress since the White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", Cm 1986, was published and issued in November 1993. A further report will be published in due course. The published documents are available in the Library.

Corporate Affairs Intelligence Unit

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the number of staff in whole-time equivalents working for the corporate affairs intelligence unit for each of the last four years and the projected number for the next two years;

(2) what was the hospitality budget for the corporate affairs intelligence unit for each of the last four years and the projected budget for the next two years;

(3) what was the budget for the corporate affairs intelligence unit in each of the last four years; and what is the projected budget for the next two years.

Mr. Sackville: On 1 January 1995 there was a total of 46 staff in the unit. In the current financial year, the unit has a manpower budget of just over £1 million and a hospitality budget of £1,200 to cover refreshments at meetings attended by external participants. Both budget and staffing have remained broadly the same since the unit was formed in September 1991. Estimates for 1995–96 are in the course of preparation.

Dental Health

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information areas she has on the extent to which dental health varies according to geographical causes or socio-economic groups; and how the variance has changed in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: Information about dental health is contained in surveys carried out every five years by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and every four years by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry. Copies of the surveys are available in the Library.

Patients Charter

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected cost of *(a)* the national launch, *(b)* the national advertising campaign and *(c)* copies of the charter for the planned expanded patients charter launch in January.

Mr. Malone: The estimated costs for the national launch of the patients charter is £140,000; for the national advertising campaign £160,000; and for the production of copies of the new patients charter, including a reserve stock for fulfilment of future requests £210,000.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of trust hospitals failed to see patients within five minutes of attendance at casualty in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) what percentage of patients were not seen immediately and their treatment need assessed in each year since April 1991.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available in the form requested as data were not collected before the patients charter was introduced in April 1992.

The percentage of patients not assessed immediately in accident and emergency departments fell from 26 per cent. in the quarter ended 31 March 1993 to 13 per cent. in the quarter ended 31 March 1994 and, in the quarter ended 30 September 1994, the last date for which information is available, stands at 10 per cent.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff are employed by the national health service; and what estimate she has made of the cost of them receiving the patients charter.

Mr. Malone: There are just under 1 million directly employed national health service staff. In addition, there are a number of agency and contracted staff working for the NHS, making an estimated total of 1.2 million staff. The estimated cost of distributing the patients charter to them is £158,000.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what previous occasions all members of staff of the NHS have received copies of the patients charter; and what was the cost on each occasion.

Mr. Malone: The original patients charter was not distributed to all national health service staff.

Junior Doctors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has on the minimum period of sleep for junior doctors each day and the minimum for each week.

Mr. Malone: There is no guidance on the daily or weekly minimum periods of sleep for junior doctors.

NHS Charges

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representation her Department has received regarding charges for national health service care.

Mr. Sackville: We have received numerous representations over the years. The national health service has no power to charge unless there is a specific statutory power to charge for a specific service.

Prostatic Cancer

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were due to, and new cases were diagnosed of, prostatic cancer in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Deaths and registrations of newly diagnosed cases of prostate cancer (ICD[1] 185) in England and Wales. 1989 is the latest year for which registration statistics are available.

	Deaths	*Registrations of new cases*
1985	6,628	9,513
1986	6,910	10,180
1987	7,166	10,837
1988	7,458	12,496
1989	7,861	12,518
1990	8,098	—
1991	8,570	—
1992	8,735	—

[1]International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount was spent on screening for prostatic cancer in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Amenity Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has on the increase in revenue collected from use of amenity beds in trust hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: None. The amount of income raised from amenity beds is a matter for trusts. Income raised from the use of amenity beds is used to improve services for national health service patients.

Children's Wards

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children's wards were closed in each of the last 10 years; and in which hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. It is for local health authorities to ensure that an appropriate level of service is provided for children in their district.

NHS Dentists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of national health service dentists in 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Malone: The available information is in the tables.

Table 1: Hospital and community health service dental staff England—as at 30 September each year (whole-time equivalent)

	Number of dental staff
1990	2,256
1991	2,166
1992	2,191
1993	2,218

Note:
These figures exclude hospital practitioners and clinical assistants who also work as general dental practitioners.

Table 2: General dental services, number of dentists[1,2] England—as at 30 September

	Number of dentists
1990	15,480
1991	15,451
1992	15,411
1993	15,773

Source:
Dental Practice Board.
Notes:
[1] Includes principals, assistants and vocational trainees.
[2] Some dentists may have contracts with more than one family health service authority.
These dentists have been counted only once.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients were registered with national health service dentists in each year since 1990–91 by family health service authorities or smallest available area per head of population;

(2) how many patients were registered for NHS dental care in 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93.

Mr. Malone: Information on registration with dental practitioners for 1990–91 will be placed in the Library. Information for subsequent years is in the Dental Practice Board publication, "Registrations: GDS Quarterly Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dental treatments took place in each year since 1990–91 in each family health service authority or smallest available area per head of population.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Table: General Dental Services, number of courses of treatment[1] per head of population by family health services authority for the financial years 1990–91 to 1993–94

Family health services authority	*1990–91 number of courses per head of population*	*1991–92 number of courses per head of population*	*1992–93 number of courses per head of population*	*1993–94 number of courses per head of population*
England	0.61	0.65	0.67	0.66
Cleveland	0.60	0.66	0.69	0.72
Cumbria	0.65	0.71	0.72	0.68
Durham	0.50	0.55	0.57	0.58
Northumberland	0.52	0.58	0.62	0.62
Gateshead	0.49	0.56	0.60	0.63
Newcastle upon Tyne	0.55	0.58	0.60	0.60
North Tyneside	0.58	0.63	0.68	0.70
South Tyneside	0.44	0.51	0.54	0.57
Sunderland	0.45	0.51	0.56	0.58

Table: General Dental Services, number of courses of treatment[1] per head of population by family health services authority for the financial years 1990–91 to 1993–94

Family health services authority	*1990–91 number of courses per head of population*	*1991–92 number of courses per head of population*	*1992–93 number of courses per head of population*	*1993–94 number of courses per head of population*
Humberside	0.57	0.62	0.64	0.64
North Yorkshire	0.69	0.76	0.77	0.76
Bradford	0.64	0.70	0.73	0.74
Calderdale	0.63	0.75	0.77	0.77
Kirklees	0.60	0.64	0.69	0.69
Leeds	0.70	0.75	0.77	0.76
Wakefield	0.53	0.58	0.68	0.72
Derbyshire	0.57	0.61	0.63	0.63
Leicestershire	0.64	0.69	0.70	0.71
Lincolnshire	0.62	0.69	0.70	0.72
Nottinghamshire	0.62	0.68	0.72	0.73
Barnsley	0.48	0.51	0.56	0.58
Doncaster	0.55	0.60	0.66	0.69
Rotherham	0.47	0.52	0.56	0.57
Sheffield	0.63	0.67	0.71	0.72
Cambridgeshire	0.68	0.71	0.72	0.70
Norfolk	0.70	0.75	0.77	0.73
Suffolk	0.78	0.84	0.87	0.88
Bedfordshire	0.47	0.52	0.54	0.55
Hertfordshire	0.65	0.67	0.70	0.70
Barnet	0.50	0.41	0.43	0.41
Brent and Harrow	0.54	0.52	0.55	0.57
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0.46	0.48	0.51	0.50
Hillingdon	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.65
Kensington, Westminster and Chelsea	0.56	0.41	0.43	0.42
Essex	0.54	0.56	0.58	0.58
Barking and Havering	0.47	0.51	0.54	0.54
Camden and Islington	0.56	0.54	0.58	0.56
City and East London	0.43	0.43	0.46	0.45
Enfield and Haringey	0.49	0.46	0.49	0.48
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0.46	0.49	0.52	0.54
East Sussex	0.69	0.74	0.76	0.75
Kent	0.60	0.63	0.61	0.53
Greenwich and Bexley	0.54	0.56	0.59	0.55
Bromley	0.51	0.41	0.40	0.35
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0.52	0.53	0.55	0.54
Surrey	0.70	0.67	0.69	0.64
West Sussex	0.76	0.79	0.80	0.78
Croydon	0.59	0.64	0.66	0.64
Kingston and Richmond	0.51	0.43	0.46	0.46
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0.50	0.48	0.50	0.50
Dorset	0.79	0.87	0.88	0.86
Hampshire	0.74	0.78	0.79	0.77
Wiltshire	0.67	0.70	0.72	0.71
Isle of Wight	0.78	0.86	0.86	0.81
Berkshire	0.61	0.59	0.61	0.58
Buckinghamshire	0.60	0.63	0.62	0.56
Northamptonshire	0.59	0.63	0.66	0.68
Oxfordshire	0.64	0.64	0.63	0.53
Avon	0.76	0.81	0.83	0.82
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.64	0.71	0.72	0.67
Devon	0.71	0.77	0.78	0.74
Gloucestershire	0.78	0.85	0.82	0.61
Somerset	0.77	0.85	0.88	0.90
Hereford and Worcester	0.68	0.74	0.76	0.78
Shropshire	0.67	0.76	0.78	0.76
Staffordshire	0.55	0.62	0.63	0.63
Warwickshire	0.66	0.71	0.72	0.70
Birmingham	0.59	0.64	0.66	0.67
Coventry	0.56	0.60	0.60	0.60
Dudley	0.58	0.65	0.67	0.68
Sandwell	0.53	0.59	0.63	0.64
Solihull	0.54	0.61	0.64	0.62
Walsall	0.44	0.51	0.53	0.57
Wolverhampton	0.60	0.65	0.69	0.71
Cheshire	0.66	0.73	0.75	0.76
Liverpool	0.53	0.56	0.60	0.62
St. Helens and Knowsley	0.48	0.55	0.59	0.61
Sefton	0.60	0.69	0.73	0.75
Wirral	0.63	0.70	0.72	0.73

Table: General Dental Services, number of courses of treatment[1] per head of population by family health services authority for the financial years 1990–91 to 1993–94

Family health services authority	*1990–91 number of courses per head of population*	*1991–92 number of courses per head of population*	*1992–93 number of courses per head of population*	*1993–94 number of courses per head of population*
Lancashire	0.58	0.65	0.66	0.65
Bolton	0.60	0.68	0.71	0.73
Bury	0.62	0.68	0.69	0.70
Manchester	0.58	0.66	0.71	0.73
Oldham	0.55	0.63	0.68	0.71
Rochdale	0.54	0.60	0.65	0.66
Salford	0.53	0.59	0.62	0.64
Stockport	0.79	0.86	0.89	0.90
Tameside	0.53	0.60	0.62	0.63
Trafford	0.75	0.82	0.85	0.89
Wigan	0.52	0.59	0.64	0.67

Source:
Dental Practice Board and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.
Notes:
[1] Dentists may treat patients who are not resident within their FHSA. Courses of treatment will not therefore be confined to the population of the FHSA.
1. OPCS mid year estimates of population.
2. The table shows data for adults only. Children are excluded because, since October 1990, dental treatment for children is carried out under capitation arrangements and information on courses of treatment are not identifiable separately.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will break down the number of NHS dentists by family health service authority or smallest available area in each year since 1990–91.

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

Discharged Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were discharged from hospital in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested. Information for regional health authorities, district health authorities, special health authorities and national health service trusts, relating to discharges and deaths for the years 1984 to 1988–89, and for finished consultant episodes for the years 1988–89 to 1993–94, is published in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England" for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94, copies of which are available in the Library.

Paediatric Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many paediatric beds there were in each year since 1989;

(2) what percentage of children were admitted to adult beds in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: Information on numbers of paediatric beds is available in "Bed Availability for England, Financial Years 1991–92 and 1993–94", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on the number of children admitted to adult beds is not available centrally.

Out-patients (Waiting Time)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has of *(a)* the longest waiting time, *(b)* the shortest waiting time and *(c)* the average waiting time, for an out-patient appointment.

Mr. Malone: Information on the waiting time for first out-patient appointments will be published shortly.

Hospital Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute, *(b)* intensive care, *(c)* long-term care (geriatric), *(d)* maternity, *(e)* paediatric, *(f)* psychiatric, *(g)* casualty and *(h)* total hospital beds were available in the national health service, in each year since 1978 and for each region of England.

Mr. Sackville: For the financial years 1988–89 to 1993–94 the information requested on numbers of acute, intensive care, geriatric, maternity, paediatric, mental illness and total beds by region has been published in "Bed availability for England". The volume for the financial year 1991–92 covers the years 1988–89, 1989–90, 1990–91 and 1991–92, and the subsequent volumes cover the two later years. Copies of the volumes are available in the Library.

For the period 1978 to 1987, data were not collected on the same basis. National information on bed numbers was published in the statistical bulletins, "NHS Hospital Activity Statistics for England 1974–1984" and "NHS Hospital Activity Analysis for England 1979–1988–89", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on numbers of accidents and emergency beds is not available centrally.

Heart Bypass Surgery

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the national standard waiting time for coronary artery bypass surgery where a patient's life is under threat.

Mr. Malone: It is not appropriate to have a waiting time standard for coronary bypass surgery where a patient's life is under threat. All such patients are treated as emergencies.

Patients are placed on a waiting list only if, in the opinion of a clinician at the time of assessment, their condition is judged to be stable.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of patients die while on the waiting list for coronary artery bypass surgery;

(2) what information her Department has of the number of people dying while waiting for hospital heart bypass operations.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the then Minister for Health gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 19 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *559*.

Dental Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental examinations have occurred in England in each of the last five years.

Mr. Malone: The information is shown in the table.

Estimated number of national health service dental examinations for adult patients for the financial years 1987–88 to 1993–94.

England *Year ending*	*Thousands examination*
1987–88	19,889
1988-89	20,904
1989–90	19,402
1990–91	18,951
1991–92	19,548
1992–93	20,000
1993–94	19,488

Source:
Dental Practice Board.
Note:
1. The table shows data for adults only. Children are excluded because, since October 1990, dental examinations for children are carried out under capitation arrangements and are not identifiable separately. The data are for examinations carried out in the general dental service only.

Hospital Wards

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of wards were single sex in each year since 1989; and how many beds there were in them.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Ambulance Service

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of ambulance services failed to meet their patients charter attendance record in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: Latest information is for the year 1993–94. Of the 40 English ambulance services, as constituted in that year, 10 to 25 per cent. did not meet the patients charter requirement. For an ambulance responding to an emergency call, the patients charter standard requirement is to arrive at the scene of an incident, in 95 per cent. of cases, within 14 minutes in the case of urban services and within 19 minutes in the case of rural services.

Private Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total income from private patients in 1993–94 by trust, health authority area and regional health authority area.

Mr. Sackville: Information on income from private patients in 1993–94 will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private patients were treated in NHS hospitals, by district health authority, trust and regional health authority area, in the latest available year.

Mr. Sackville: Information on private patient out-patient attendances is contained in "1993–94 Outpatients and Ward Attenders England" and on private patient finished consultant episodes in 1992–93, "Hospital Episodes Statistics". Both publications are available in the Library.

Health Education Authority

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the reasons for the changes proposed to the funding of the Health Education Authority.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) on 19 December 1994 at columns *989–90*.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the budget for the Health Education Authority in each of the last five years; and what is the projected budget for the next three years.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) on 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *126–27*. Total funding for 1990–91 was £29,025,000.

Hospital Facilities

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures she has on the standard of catering services, security and cleanliness in hospitals in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The most recent statistical information available centrally derives from the 1994 National Audit Office report on hospital catering and the 1994 Audit Commission report, "Ensuring Probity in the NHS", copies of which are available in the Library. The specification and monitoring of standards for local catering, security and cleaning services are operational matters which are the responsibility of local management in the NHS.

Hospital Activity Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the activity figures for each of the last 10 years for all hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available on an individual hospital basis. The available information relates to regional health authorities, district health authorities, special health authorities and national health service trusts. It is published in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England" for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94, and "Outpatients and ward attenders for England" for the years 1992–93 and 1993–94, copies of which are available in the Library.

Operations (Cancellations)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in each year since April 1991.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally. Information on cancelled operating sessions is published annually in "NHS operating theatres, availability and use: England" copies of which are available in the Library.

Privatisation

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what national health service services, including pathology, have been privatised since 1991.

Mr. Sackville: None.

District Health Authorities

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total administrative budget of district health authorities in 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Total district health authority administration costs 1991–92 to 1993–94

£000s

1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
327,037	387,387	477,798

Source:
Annual accounts of district health authorities.
Notes:
[1] The above figures represent the total revenue expenditure on the pay and accommodation costs of staff of all disciplines and their support staff employed in district health authorities. They exclude administrative support in hospital departments and at other local levels which is regarded as operational expenditure.
[2] The costs are those reported in the accounts as "Authority administration and purchasing expenses". These figures include capital charges.
[3] The figures for 1993–94 are provisional.

Housing

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has of a correlation between cold and damp housing and demand for national health service services.

Mr. Bowis: Very little and what there is is conflicting.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in each region waited more than two years for treatment after the consultant had put them on the waiting list in each year since April 1991.

Mr. Malone: The number of patients who have been waiting for more than two years for admission for in-patient or day-case treatment are shown in the table.

Region	*As at 31 March 1992*	*As at 31 March 1993*	*As at 31 March 1994*
Northern	1	0	0
Yorkshire	15	0	0
Trent	4	0	0
East Anglia	35	0	1
North West Thames	9	0	0
North East Thames	785	0	0
South East Thames	104	0	0
South West Thames	0	0	0
Wessex	0	0	0
Oxford	0	0	0
South Western	10	0	0
West Midlands	158	0	0
Mersey	0	0	0
North Western	3	0	0

Patients waiting at the special health authorities are not included in the above.

DEFENCE

Fox Hunting

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many horses owned by his Department have been killed as a result of participation in fox hunting in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances members of the armed forces are permitted to participate in fox hunting activities during duty hours.

Mr. Soames: Members of the armed forces participate in fox hunting by invitation only; such activity is permitted only at the discretion of the commanding officer, and is never pursued to the detriment of military or ceremonial duties.

Veterinary Officer, Melton Mowbray

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the post of Officer Commanding Veterinary Establishment, Melton Mowbray, is a full-time post.

Mr. Soames: The Defence Animal Centre is a Defence agency, and has a full-time chief executive.

Trident

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total *(a)* original planned cost and *(b)* final cost in the Trident works programme for consultancy work carried out on that programme.

Mr. Freeman: As recorded in the National Audit Office's report "MOD: Management of the Trident Works Programme", published in July last year, the cost of consultancy work was initially estimated in 1984 at £78 million, equivalent to £122 million at 1994 prices, while the latest estimate is £360 million. As some contracts remain to be settled, a final figure is not yet available.

Faslane

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department became aware of a number of earthquakes taking place in the Faslane area between 1985 and 1991; and what were the dates and sizes of the earthquakes on the Richter scale.

Mr. Freeman: There was a seismic event at Dunoon, some 10 miles from Faslane, in September 1985 which

measured locally 3.3 on the Richter scale. There was a second event near Ardentinny on the west side of Loch Long in June 1991, which measured locally 2.0 on the Richter scale. My Department became aware of both events shortly after they occurred.

Airwork Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the contract awarded to British Aerospace for the repair of F3 Tornado aircraft damaged while undergoing overhaul by Airwork Services at RAF St. Athan, with respect to the advertising of the contract for competitive tender, the value of the contract relative to the estimate and the length of time to be taken for completion; what other contracts have been or will be awarded with respect to F3 Tornados damaged by Airwork Services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Subject to the agreement of satisfactory terms and conditions, we expect to award shortly a contract to British Aerospace for the repair of these aircraft. Details of the price quoted and the potential value of the contract are commercially confidential between my Department and BAe. We expect the first of the 16 aircraft concerned to be repaired and returned to RAF service by the autumn of this year, with the remainder following over the subsequent 18 months. At this stage, we do not expect to award any other contracts with respect to the Tornado F3s damaged by airwork.

Owing to the complexity of the repair task, we concluded that the work would have to be carried out by the United Kingdom design contractor, British Aerospace; the contract was not therefore advertised for competitive tender.

Desert Fever Syndrome

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the number of current and ex-service men thought to be suffering from desert fever syndrome.

Mr. Soames: We have no scientific evidence to date that any current or ex-members of the British armed forces are suffering from the alleged desert fever syndrome, nor is there any medical or scientific evidence of its existence as a separate medical condition. My Department has established a medical assessment programme for any Gulf veteran who is concerned about his or her health as a result of service in the Gulf conflict. Around 200 have already come forward and none of those so far examined has been found to be suffering from a medical condition peculiar to their Gulf service. For their own reassurance I would urge any concerned individuals who have not already done so to come forward for examination as soon as possible.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up an independent inquiry into the syndrome known as desert fever syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Soames: There remain no scientific or medical evidence that members of the British armed forces who served in the Gulf conflict are suffering from any unexplained symptoms that would call for such an inquiry. We do, however, keep this matter under continuous review.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has had from individuals and organisations concerning desert fever syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Approximately 90 representations have been received from individuals and seven from interested organisations relating to the alleged desert storm syndrome. Most have expressed concern about media reports of a mystery illness affecting United Kingdom Gulf veterans. In responding to them, my Department has taken the opportunity to present the known scientific and medical facts—which show no evidence of a medical condition peculiar to service in the Gulf—to provide reassurance of our concern for the health of all United Kingdom service personnel, and to offer individual medical assessment to veterans concerned that their health may have been affected by service in the Gulf.

Royal Navy Armament Depots

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce efficiency measures at the Royal Navy armament depots following the defence costs study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As part of "Front Line First" proposals to introduce a range of management efficiencies in Royal Navy, armament depots were detailed in consultation documents issued on 19 August. Having given full and careful consideration to the representations made during consultation, I have decided to proceed with the implementation of efficiencies in the Royal Navy armament depots at Gosport, Ernesettle, Beith and Coulport district, which includes the NATO armament depot at Glen Douglas and the module repair and calibration facility at Faslane. In addition, the conventional ammunition task in the west of Scotland will be rationalised and concentrated in future at the NATO armament depot, Glen Douglas. We will continue to consult with staff and the trades unions about the detailed implementation of these measures.

Military Corrective Training Centre, Colchester

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of offences committed for which prisoners at the military corrective training centre at Colchester were convicted.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 10 December 1994]:* My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence has written to the hon. Member and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations, numbers, types and nationalities of aircraft, and nature of the breach, for each of the confirmed, breaches of flying regulations other than low flying regulations during 1993.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* In addition to the 47 breaches of low flying regulations specified in the answer I gave the hon. Member on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *906*, RAF police

flying complaints flight investigations confirmed two incidents during 1993 in which aircraft generated sonic booms over land in contravention of military flying regulations:

Date	*Location*	*Nationality*
21 July	Lowestoft, Suffolk	One Norwegian F16
11 August	St Andrews, Fife	One USAF F15E

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 January 1995

PRIME MINISTER

EC Referendum

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost to public funds of the referendum in 1975 on membership of the European Community; what that cost would be at today's prices; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The cost to public funds of the 1975 referendum on membership of the European Community was approximately £6.1 million, equivalent to £25.5 million at today's prices.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister how many Government agencies have regional offices in the west country and in Bristol; and how many jobs have been created in each area as a result.

The Prime Minister: At 1 October 1994, there were 43 Government Departments and next steps agencies with regional offices in the west country employing over 26,000 staff, and 45 offices in Bristol employing nearly 5,500 staff.

No. 10 Downing Street

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister when was the last occasion that an item from the state property inventories maintained at No. 10 Downing street was discovered missing; what was the item; whether the item missing was discovered by the Cabinet Office internal auditors, or by one of his officials responsible for making periodic checks of the inventory; where the item missing was discovered; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Since I became Prime Minister no item of state property has been found to be missing whenever a check has been made of an inventory.

Company Political Donations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ban company political donations.

The Prime Minister: No. The present policy is sufficient. The Companies Act 1985 requires companies to disclose, in the directors' report, political donations exceeding £200.

Peerages

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the peerages created since 30 November 1990, together with the dates on which the holders were introduced.

The Prime Minister: Peerages created since 30 November 1990 are listed, together with the dates on which the holders were introduced.

Title	*Created*	*Introduced*
Lord Waddington	4 December 1990	4 December 1990
Lord Sterling of Plaistow	17 January 1991	23 January 1991
Lord White of Hull	25 January 1991	29 January 1991
Lord Runcie	1 February 1991	26 February 1991
Lord Palumbo	4 February 1991	12 February 1991
Lord Griffiths of Pforestfach	5 February 1991	20 February 1991
Baroness James of Holland Park	7 February 1991	19 February 1991
Lord Laing of Dunphail	8 February 1991	19 February 1991
Baroness Seccombe	14 February 1991	26 February 1991
Lord Wolfson of Sunningdale	26 March 1991	26 March 1991
Lord Desai	5 June 1991	18 June 1991
Baroness Hamwee	6 June 1991	12 June 1991
Lord Marlesford	7 June 1991	11 June 1991
Lord Judd	10 June 1991	25 June 1991
Baroness Denton of Wakefield	11 June 1991	11 June 1991
Baroness Hilton of Eggardon	14 June 1991	2 July 1991
Baroness Mallalieu	19 June 1991	19 June 1991
Lord Hollick	20 June 1991	25 June 1991
Baroness O'Cathain	21 June 1991	3 July 1991
Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn	24 June 1991	9 July 1991
Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish	26 June 1991	26 June 1991
Lord Skidelsky	15 July 1991	17 July 1991
Baroness Perry of Southwark	16 July 1991	16 July 1991
Lord Cheshire	17 July 1991	24 July 1991
Lord MacFarlane of Bearsden	29 July 1991	15 October 1991
Lord Craig of Radley	30 July 1991	16 October 1991
Lord Browne-Wilkinson (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	1 October 1991	15 October 1991
Lord Mustill (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	10 January 1992	11 March 1992
Lord Rix	27 January 1992	12 February 1992
Lord Prentice	30 January 1992	12 February 1992
Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank	12 February 1992	25 February 1992
Lord Wilson of Tillyorn	14 February 1992	15 July 1992
Lord Slynn (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	11 March 1992	11 March 1992
Lord Wakeham	24 April 1992 am	28 April 1992
Baroness Chalker of Wallasey	24 April 1992 pm	28 April 1992
Lord Taylor of Gosforth	27 April 1992 am	29 April 1992
Lord Rodger of Earsferry	29 April 1992	29 April 1992
Baroness Thatcher	26 June 1992	30 June 1992
Lord Finsberg	27 June 1992	13 July 1992
Lord Parkinson	29 June 1992 am	7 July 1992
Lord Healey	29 June 1992 pm	1 July 1992
Lord Owen	30 June 1992 am	8 July 1992
Lord Howe of Aberavon	30 June 1992 pm	1 July 1992
Lord Lawson of Blaby	1 July 1992 am	6 July 1992

Title	Created	Introduced
Lord Merlyn-Rees	1 July 1992 pm	7 July 1992
Lord Howell	2 July 1992	9 July 1992
Lord Moore of Lower Marsh	3 July 1992	6 July 1992
Lord Tebbit	6 July 1992	9 July 1992
Lord Younger of Prestwick	7 July 1992	14 July 1992
Lord Amery of Lustleigh	8 July 1992 am	8 July 1992
Lord Walker of Worcester	8 July 1992 pm	21 October 1992
Lord Archer of Sandwell	9 July 1992	14 July 1992
Lord Ashley of Stoke	10 July 1992	13 July 1992
Lord Eatwell	14 July 1992	19 October 1992
Lord Weatherill	15 July 1992	15 July 1992
Lord Ewing of Kirkford	17 July 1992	26 October 1992
Lord Geraint	18 July 1992	27 October 1992
Lord Stewartby	20 July 1992	20 October 1992
Lord Clark of Kempston	21 July 1992	28 October 1992
Lord Plant of Highfield	24 July 1992	4 November 1992
Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare	27 July 1992	20 October 1992
Lord Ridley of Liddesdale	28 July 1992	28 October 1992
Baroness Jay of Paddington	29 July 1992	21 October 1992
Lord Williams of Mostyn	30 July 1992	26 October 1992
Lord Braine of Wheatley	10 August 1992	2 November 1992
Lord Cooke of Islandreagh	11 August 1992	3 November 1992
Lord Barber of Tewkesbury	12 August 1992	2 November 1992
Lord Hayhoe	21 August 1992	3 November 1992
Lord Gilmour of Craigmillar	25 August 1992	4 November 1992
Lord Elis-Thomas	18 September 1992	27 October 1992
Lord Woolf (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	1 October 1992	11 November 1992
Baroness Williams of Crosby	1 February 1993	17 February 1993
Lord Kingsdown	14 July 1993	21 July 1993
Lord Dahrendorf	15 July 1993	21 July 1993
Lord Menuhin	19 July 1993	20 July 1993
Lord Attenborough	30 July 1993	25 October 1993
Lord Lloyd of Berwick (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	1 October 1993	12 October 1993
Lord Haskel	4 October 1993	12 October 1993
Lord Dean of Harptree	5 October 1993	13 October 1993
Baroness Gould of Potternewton	6 October 1993	13 October 1993
Lord Dixon-Smith	11 October 1993	19 October 1993
Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde	12 October 1993	19 October 1993
Lord Lester of Herne Hill	13 October 1993	3 November 1993
Baroness Miller of Hendon	14 October 1993	20 October 1993
Lord Tugendhat	15 October 1993	27 October 1993
Lord Nolan (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	14 January 1994	18 January 1994
Lord Wright of Richmond	14 February 1994	16 February 1994
Lord Nickson	22 March 1994	4 May 1994
Lord Quirk	12 July 1994	20 July 1994
Lord Phillips of Ellesmere	14 July 1994	12 October 1994
Lord Sheppard of Didgemere	6th September 1994	26 October 1994
Lord Hambro	26 September 1994	26 October 1994
Lord Dubs	27 September 1994	19 October 1994
Lord Gladwin of Clee	28 September 1994	18 October 1994
Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton	29 September 1994	11 October 1994
Lord Shaw of Northstead	30 September 1994	11 October 1994
Lord Nicholls of Brikenhead (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	3 October 1994	19 October 1994
Lord Tope	4 October 1994	12 October 1994
Baroness Rawlings	5 October 1994	18 October 1994
Baroness Thomas of Walliswood	6 October 1994	2 November 1994
Lord Kingsland	7 October 1994	2 November 1994
Lord Blaker	10 October 1994	25 October 1994
Lord Steyn (a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary)	11 January 1995	18 January 1995

Windsor Castle (Oil)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister who is entitled to revenues accruing from oil found in the grounds of Windsor castle.

The Prime Minister: The holder of the petroleum licence concerned—CANUK Exploration Ltd.—is entitled to revenues accruing from oil found in the grounds of Windsor castle. The company will be liable to corporation tax on its profits.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Prime Minister which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

The Prime Minister: The preferred carrier for any particular civil servant's travel will depend on the circumstances of the journey concerned and value for money. For civil servants travelling in connection with the Prime Minister's overseas visits on scheduled flights, preferred carrier arrangements have been made with:

British Airways
British Midland
Virgin
Austrian Airlines
Lufthansa

Ministerial Visits

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he last visited Paisley or Renfrewshire.

The Prime Minister: I have not had the opportunity to include Paisley or Renfrewshire in my visits to Scotland, since becoming Prime Minister.

Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will meet the hon. Member for Paisley, South to discuss the

provisions of the Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have asked my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for industry and local government at the Scottish Office to contact the hon. Member with a view to an early meeting.

TRANSPORT

Data Protection Register

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the list of file names registered with the Data Protection Register as requested by section 21 of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mr. Norris: Details of the Department of Transport's registrations are held by the Data Protection Registrar in the Data Protection Register. The register is available for public scrutiny at the DPR's office.

Driving Standards Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the future of collective pay bargaining in the Driving Standards Agency;

(2) if he will make it his policy that a Welsh language service will still be available following market testing of the driving test booking section of the Driving Standards Agency;

(3) if all bids for the contract for driving test booking work have taken account of the cost of possible redundancies;

(4) if he will make a statement on the applicability of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 to staff in all regional offices in the event of the contract for driving test bookings being won by EDS;

(5) how many staff within the Driving Standards Agency have entered into individual pay contracts with the agency.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Driving Standards Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letters from L. M. Manley to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 16 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question requesting a statement on the future of collective pay bargaining in the Driving Standards Agency.

I can confirm that the Driving Standards Agency is fully committed to the principles of collective pay bargaining both at the present and in future negotiations.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about whether he will make it his policy that a Welsh language service will still be available following the market testing of the Driver Test Booking Section of the Driving Standards Agency.

The Invitation to Tender for the driver test booking service specified that staff must have the skills necessary to provide the service required, which includes the provision of a Welsh language service.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about whether all the bids for the contract of driver examiner booking have taken account of the cost of possible redundancies.

The estimated cost of redundancies associated with each bid has been taken into account in the evaluation process.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question about whether TUPE will apply to staff in all regional offices in the event of the contract for the driver test booking being awarded to EDS.

No decision has yet been taken on the result of the market test. If the contract were awarded to EDS Ltd., then TUPE would apply to those staff wholly or substantially engaged in the provision of the booking service.

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question concerning the number of Driving Standards Agency staff who have entered into individual pay contracts with the Agency.

No members of the Agency's staff have entered into individual contracts with the Agency. However at present 403 staff have signified their acceptance of the Agency's 1994 pay award.

Marine Safety

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has, following the findings of the recent report into seaworthiness by the Marine Safety Agency, to bring forward further regulations aimed at *(a)* tightening existing laws and safety standards and *(b)* giving greater powers of detention to the Marine Safety Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Government believe that proper enforcement of existing international conventions is the key to securing better standards. The Department of Transport will continue both to operate an effective programme of port state inspections and to publish details of substandard ships. We shall also maintain our efforts within the International Maritime Organisation to ensure that all flag states exercise proper control over their ships. We are considering the scope of the United Kingdom's powers of detention as part of our response to Lord Donaldson's report into the prevention of pollution from merchant shipping.

Doncaster Relief Road Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost to public funds on *(a)* the design and *(b)* the pre-planning work his Department carried out into the north bridge relief road scheme at Doncaster.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 16 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the cost of planning and designing the Highways Agency's A638 Doncaster North Bridge Relief Road scheme which is currently under construction.

Up to the start of construction at the beginning of February 1992, the cost of planning and design work for this scheme was £467,738.

I hope this is helpful.

Rail Ticketing Services (Scotland)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the proposed introduction of core railway stations for

through-ticketing purposes on rail services in the Scottish Highlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: None. The proposal for core stations is just one option for ticketing arrangements at railway stations on which the Rail Regulator is currently consulting.

Donaldson Report

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his full response to the Donaldson report recommendations.

Mr. Norris: Shortly.

Radioactive Freight (Stratford Station)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about circumstances of the train carrying radioactive spent fuel rods from Bradwell power station in the last week of November; for how long the train was halted at Stratford station in east London; for how long it was left unattended; and what assessment he has made of the implications for public safety.

Mr. Watts: On 1 December 1994 a train carrying irradiated nuclear fuel was delayed for 21 minutes at Stratford by the action of two trespassers on the track, who were removed by British Transport police. At no time was the train left unattended. There was no radiological hazard to the public from this irresponsible action. The trespassers themselves risked fatal injury by interfering on an electrified track.

Cargo Boats

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for new or amended regulations governing the maximum number of people allowed on non-passenger cargo boats.

Mr. Norris: The maximum number of passengers permitted on non-passenger cargo ships is 12. This limitation is accepted nationally and internationally through long-standing safety conventions and there are no plans to change it.

M25

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has yet received a report from the Highways Agency on the options for increasing the capacity of the M25 between junctions 10 and 12.

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency has been working on options for increasing capacity between junctions 10 and 12 but I am not yet in a position to make an announcement.

Railway Tracks (Drainage)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his estimate of the extent of the use of tin slag as drainage material under railway tracks.

(2) what is the level of radioactivity in tin slag used as drainage material under railway tracks.

Mr. Watts: Tin slag is not used by Railtrack as a drainage material under railway tracks, nor was it used previously by British Rail.

Air Travel (Pollution)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the research being done or commissioned by his Department into pollution caused by expanding air travel in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the European Union and *(c)* worldwide.

Mr. Norris: My Department is supporting collaborative European research into the effect of aircraft emissions of oxides of nitrogen upon processes such as global warming and ozone depletion. Further joint projects to develop this work and examine other pollutants are being considered. Results are being fed into the major international scientific assessments under the auspices of the intergovernmental panel on climate change and the United Nations environment programme. In turn, these assessments inform deliberations within the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which is the appropriate body for setting emission standards for aircraft worldwide.

Radioactive Material (Air Transport)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the revised International Atomic Energy Agency guidelines on air transportation of radioactive material over the United Kingdom will be issued; and if he will prohibit such activity until the guidelines are in place.

Mr. Norris: The next edition of the IAEA regulations for the safe transport of radioactive material is due for publication in 1996. Meanwhile, there is no reasons for prohibiting the air transport of radioactive material on safety grounds.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now publish the full west coast main line feasibility study, including costings, recommendations and conclusions, submitted to him by Railtrack and West Coast Main Line Development Co. Ltd. in December 1994.

Mr. Watts: We expect that Railtrack will publish a summary of its findings.

Operation Sea Fire

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, at what time during Operation Sea Fire a call was received by HM Coastguard from the chief fire officer of West Glamorgan fire service requesting 10 firefighters urgently.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 23 November 1994]:* This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 16 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question as the question deals with an operational matter, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

10 firefighters were requested by the Chief Fire Officer of West Glamorgan Fire Service at 0744 during exercise Seafire on 10 October 1994.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Talks

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent talks with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Mr. Solana; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Baldry: Mr. Solana visited Chevening on 19 to 20 December. He and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had very useful discussions covering a wide range of issues including the future of Europe and the 1996 EU inter-governmental conference, future enlargement of the EU, relations between the EU and the Mediterranean, and future European security arrangements. We also held a Brussels process meeting on Gibraltar in London on 20 December. A joint statement was issued, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Arms Embargoes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries currently subject to embargoes on the export of British military equipment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We observe mandatory embargoes imposed by the United Nations on Iraq, the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Somalia, Liberia, Libya, Rwanda and UNITA in Angola.

We also observe embargoes imposed by the European Union on China, Burma, Zaire and Sudan.

We observe a voluntary embargo agreed by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe on Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In addition, as a matter of declared national policy we refuse to supply military equipment to Argentina and Iran.

Algeria

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to protect British diplomats and other British nationals in Algeria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have reduced the number of our diplomats in Algeria. Those that remain benefit from the protection of a team of Royal Military police. Other improvements have been made to the security of the embassy. The embassy remains in close touch with the remaining members of the British community in Algeria, who have been advised to leave unless they have effective protection. British nationals are strongly advised not to travel to Algeria.

Constituency Party Correspondence

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* his letter to Conservative constituency parties setting out the benefits of EEC membership.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The article to which the hon. Member refers was prepared for Conservative party use and can be obtained from Conservative central office.

Kuwaiti Prisoners of War

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what international initiatives are under way to resolve the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait about Kuwaitis missing since the Gulf war.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Tripartite Commission—composed of the ICRC, Iraq and former coalition countries—chaired by the ICRC is the key forum for discussion of the cases of Kuwaitis missing since the Gulf war. At its December meeting, the commission agreed to the establishment of a technical sub-commission to speed up the substantive review of ICRC case files. We attach great importance to the fate of missing Kuwaitis and take every opportunity—for example, at the Security Council's reviews of sanctions—to remind Iraq of its obligations under Security Council resolutions.

Pirates, Brazil

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Brazilian authorities regarding the threat to British shipping from pirates around Brazilian ports.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: British embassy staff made representations to the Brazilian authorities about security problems off Brazilian ports, either on a bilateral basis or with our European Community partners, on four occasions in 1994.

The Brazilian authorities have acknowledged that problems exist but have yet to find the resources to allocate to improving the situation.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of proposals by western nations to send nuclear waste to Russia for reprocessing in respect of *(a)* environmental concerns and *(b)* nuclear weapons proliferation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are not aware of any proposals by western countries to send their nuclear waste to Russia for reprocessing.

Weapons Conventions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government expect to ratify (i) the additional protocols to the Geneva conventions and (ii) the 1981 inhumane weapons convention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made clear our intention to ratify the additional protocols to the Geneva conventions at an early opportunity. This depends, however, in part on securing parliamentary time for domestic legislation which will be required for ratification.

We expect to ratify the 1981 inhumane weapons convention within the next few weeks - in good time to be states parties for the review conference of the convention due to take place in September of this year.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the division

of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Baldry: The FCO diplomatic wing's only executive agency is Wilton Park. FCO Ministers are responsible for determining the policy and resources within which Wilton Park organises its programmes of conferences on behalf of the FCO. Operational matters and day-to-day management of the agency are the responsibility of the chief executive.

The Wilton Park departmental board is responsible for advising FCO Ministers on matters relating to Wilton Park policy and activities.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will support a global ban on the production, sales, stockpiling and use of anti-personnel mines;

(2) if he will call for the United Nations to impose a global ban on production, stockpiling, sale and use of anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We support international efforts to strengthen controls on the stockpiling, transfer and use of anti-personnel land mines but believe that a complete ban at this stage would neither secure broad international support nor be properly implemented.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Baldry: The preferred carrier for any particular civil servant's travel will depend on the circumstances of the journey concerned and value for money. For regular requirements my Department has entered into arrangements with:

British Airways
British Midland
Virgin
Austrian Airlines
Lufthansa

School Fees

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many children of employees of his Department currently attend private or independent schools and have their fees funded by his Department.

Mr. Baldry: Some 746 children of diplomatic service and ODA staff currently attend boarding schools in the United Kingdom. Details of the total number of children attending fee-paying schools at posts overseas are not available.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total costs to his Department of funding the children of employees of his Department who attend private or independent schools in each of the last five years.

Mr. Baldry: In each of the last five years expenditure on children attending boarding schools in the United Kingdom was as follows:

Financial Year	*£ million*
1993–94	8.69
1992–93	7.88
1991–92	7.73
1990–91	7.58
1989–90	7.21

Expenditure on children attending fee-paying schools overseas was as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1993–94	2.31
1992–93	2.00
1991–92	1.80
1990–91	1.68
1989–90	1.58

Embassy Costs

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which 25 embassies had the highest running costs for the latest year for which information is available; and what was the amount spent in entertaining for that year and the number of butlers, cooks and other household staff employed.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 19 December 1994]:* The latest available information, mainly in respect of 1993–94, is contained in the following table. Entertainment by all staff at the post concerned is included. Costs reflect local wage and price levels as well as the type of entertainment and numbers entertained. Staff numbers are of the total employed in the residence of the ambassador or high commissioner; not all such staff will be employed wholly or partly on entertainment duties.

Post	*Entertainment (£ thousands)*	*Numbers of Residence Staff*
Athens	63	11.0
Bangkok	54	11.0
Bonn	155	9.5
Brussels	51	5.5
Buenos Aires	54	9.5
Cairo	48	14.0
Canberra	48	9.0
Dhaka	49	8.5
Jakarta	51	8.0
Lagos/Abuja	109	8.0
Madrid	130	9.0
Moscow	105	10.0
New Delhi	58	18.0
Ottawa	68	7.0
Paris	331	17.0
Peking	75	9.0
Riyadh	68	4.0
Rome	107	10.5
Seoul	65	5.0
Singapore	61	11.0
The Hague	53	7.0
Tokyo	317	13.0
Vienna	59	8.0
Warsaw	42	6.5
Washington	270	19.9

TREASURY

Insider Dealing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the law on insider dealing warrants review;

(2) what assessment he has made of the Stock Exchange review of insider dealing.

Mr. Nelson: New legislation on insider dealing came into force on 1 March 1994. The Government will keep its effectiveness under review but have no plans to propose any changes.

I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the London Stock Exchange's recent consultation document on preventing disorderly markets, entitled "Orderly markets: Dealings ahead of the disclosure of price sensitive information". The Government are generally supportive of action by the London Stock Exchange which is designed to prevent disorderly markets.

VAT (Northern Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the rate of VAT in Northern Ireland for *(a)* gas for domestic heating and *(b)* the rental of the fuel tanks containing the gas; and what are the rates in Great Britain.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The rate of VAT applicable both to gas for domestic heating and the rental of tanks containing such gas is 8 per cent. throughout the United Kingdom.

VAT Investigations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was recovered through VAT investigations and the control programme in the last financial year; and how many staff are employed on these duties.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1993–94, HM Customs and Excise finalised approximately 1,150 cases of fraudulent evasion of VAT. Some 109 cases were dealt with through criminal investigations using the VAT Act 1994 and other statutes, and the rest were dealt with using the civil penalty regime introduced in the Finance Act 1985.

These cases involved VAT arrears and penalties in excess of £40 million and custodial prison sentences in the order of 100 years.

By its nature, the detection of fraud also prevents further evasion. We estimate the evasion prevented for 1993–94 to be in excess of £120 million as a result of the investigation effort.

Some 613 staff were employed in 1993–94 on VAT investigation work.

In the financial year 1993–94, 5,429 staff years were utilised in VAT assurance visiting. Gross additional liability identified in the course of the visiting programme was £2,140 million. Taking over declarations of VAT into account, the net additional liability discovered was £1,324 million.

VAT Offices

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total cost, including building, refurbishment and staff allowances, of merging the London-south collection local VAT and excise office into the single integrated office located in Southwark and officially opened in March 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total cost including building, refurbishment and staff allowances of merging the London south collection local VAT and excise offices into the single integrated office located in Southwark and officially opened in March 1993 was £4,898,300.

The minimum cost of maintaining the separate local VAT and Excise offices was estimated to be £2,836,900.

Annual savings on running costs from merging the offices were calculated to be £663,800 at 1993–94 prices, which means that the additional one-off costs of integration will be paid back in about three years.

The integrated office has a secure lease until 2009 and will continue to be used by Customs following a reorganisation of the regional structure.

VAT Rates

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what options Her Majesty's Government possess to reduce rates of value added tax from existing levels within the framework of treaties of the European community and directives deriving therefrom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government have the option of applying one or two reduced rates of not less than 5 per cent. to goods and services listed in annex H, the reduced rates list, to the sixth VAT directive.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Nelson: Roles and responsibilities are spelt out in the relevant framework document, available in the Library.

Tax Office, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have visited or telephoned Doncaster tax office for information or advice during the current financial year to date; and what were the figures for each of the last four financial years.

Sir George Young: During the current financial year to date, 17,093 people have visited and 66,011 people have telephoned the tax offices in Doncaster. Figures for each of the last three financial years are as follows:

	Telephone Calls	*Visitors*
Year to April 1992	82,685	27,506
Year to April 1993	91,063	27,584
Year to April 1994	101,752	25,487

No records are held for the period prior to April 1991. Data for Doncaster collection office are not available for any year and are therefore not included in the above figures.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to relocate Doncaster tax office; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Plans currently exist to restructure the two Doncaster tax districts together with Doncaster collection into a single new office based in Doncaster.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current annual cost of keeping Doncaster tax office open; and what was the cost for each of the previous four years in real terms.

Sir George Young: The Inland Revenue has three offices in Doncaster; two tax districts and one collection office. The figures below, rounded to the nearest £'000, are for all three offices and are in 1994–95 constant prices.

	£
1990–91	2,437,000
1991–92	2,632,000
1992–93	2,595,500
1993–94	2,658,000
1994–95 (latest forecast)	2,659,000

Share Option Profits (Tax)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to tax share option profits.

Sir George Young: I refer to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Don Valley on 10 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *7–8*.

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many parliamentary questions he has referred to chief executives of next steps agencies in each year since 1992.

Mr. Nelson: Three questions on day-to-day operational matters were referred to agency chief executives for reply in October 1992.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was his policy in the EU Monetary Committee towards the admission of Austria to the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom agreed to the terms under which Austria joined the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system as set out in the Monetary Committee communiqué of 7 January 1995. Copies of the communiqué have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Tax Havens

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount of tax avoided per annum by the use of overseas tax havens.

Sir George Young: The information on which to base such an estimate is not available.

Investment Magazines

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Treasury subscribes to the investment magazine *Best Investment* and *Small Company Investor*.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury does not subscribe to the magazines *Best Investment* and *Small Company Investor*.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a list of the investment publications to which Her Majesty's Treasury subscribes.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury subscribes to the following publications which cover investment and related subjects:

Admissions to Securities to Listing Amendments
Bank of England Quarterly Report
Banker
Banking Technology
Banking World
Banker's Almanac
Corporate Money
Economist
Financial Adviser
Financial Regulation Report
Financial Services Law Updates
Futures and Options Plus
Futures and Option World
International Stock Exchange Official Yearbook
Investors Chronicle
Money Marketing
Money Observer
Money Week
Moneyfacts
Planned Savings
Project Appraisal
Stock Exchange Quarterly
Survey of Current Business

Private Medical Insurance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total value of tax relief provided to those eligible who have private medical insurance; and what is the administrative cost of providing such tax relief.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The total cost of income tax relief on premiums for private medical insurance contracts in respect of individuals aged 60 or over is estimated to be £95 million in 1994–95.

Administrative costs are estimated to be about £150,000.

NHS Charges

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amounts of tax revenue are generated from charges in the national health service; and what plans he has to increase such revenue.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* None.

Royal Household

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the range of increase of salaries in percentage terms for directors of the royal household over the last 12 months; which receive performance pay in addition to a basic salary; who

recommended these salaries; and what control is exercised by his Department;

(2) which directors of the royal household had their salaries linked to that of a second permanent secretary in the civil service in 1992–93 and in 1993–94; and which are currently so linked;

(3) which directors of the royal household currently have 16.7 per cent. deducted from salary in lieu of rent.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The salaries of the principal private secretary to the Queen, and the Keeper of the Privy Purse have, for some years, been linked to those of a second permanent secretary in the civil service. They and other directors received the 5.4 per cent. increase awarded by the SSRB to comparable civil service grades in 1994 with the exception of one director who is on a short-term contract. Performance pay has not yet been introduced at this level, pending the outcome of a current pay review of senior grades. Performance pay for the individual on short-term contract is determined in discussions with the permanent secretary to the Treasury. Under the present arrangements, all contribute for their official accommodation with a deduction of 6 per cent. of their after-tax salary but most do not have an additional salary abatement.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Disconnections

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many of the water supply disconnections that have occurred in Lewisham over the last 12 months are attributable to cases where customers had water metering;

(2) how many water supply disconnections there have been in Lewisham over the past 12 months;

(3) what is Thames Water Utilities' programme for water metering in the London borough of Lewisham.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) on 28 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *482*.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many landfill sites, which are under consideration for authorisation to dispose of low-level radioactive waste, do not have authorisation at present;

(2) if he will list the landfill sites that are under consideration for the disposal of intermediate and high-level radioactive waste.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr Betts) on Wednesday 7 December, *Official Report*, columns *215-16*.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* local authority and *(b)* privately operated landfill sites have authorisation to dispose of low-level radioactive waste in (i) England and Wales, (ii) the east midlands and (iii) Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Atkins: A number of landfill sites in England and Wales currently receive low-level radioactive waste for disposal by controlled burial. These sites are not themselves authorised, but are specified in authorisations under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 to receive the waste. The sites, divided into those operated by local authority and privately operated, are as listed:

Sites	*Operators*
England and Wales (excluding East Midlands and Nottinghamshire)	
Cowpen Bewley Tip, Cleveland	Privately Operated
Waste Ponds, Walney Island, Cumbria	Privately Operated
Magnesium Elektron site, Greater Manchester	Privately Operated
Braziers Landfill, Hertfordshire	Privately Operated
SCM Chemicals site, Humberside	Privately Operated
Clifton Marsh, Lancashire	Privately Operated
Beddingham Quarry, Sussex	Privately Operated
Walton Arpley, Cheshire	Local Authority Operated
Beighton Tip, South Yorkshire	Local Authority Operated
Milton Landfill, Cambridge	Local Authority Waste Disposal Co.
Cilgwyn Quarry, Gwynedd	Local Authority Waste Disposal Co.
(ii) East Midlands	
Hilts Quarry, Derbyshire	Privately Operated
(iii) Nottinghamshire	
Nil	

Four of these 12 sites receive low-level radioactive waste from premises licensed under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965, and which are local to the site of burial. The remaining sites receive waste generated by activities which are not a part of the nuclear industry, most commonly hospitals and universities.

London Residuary Body

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of money has been raised by the London Residuary Body since its institution; and how much it has distributed to the London borough of Barnet.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Since its inception, the London Residuary Body has distributed over £576 million in capital receipts and over £223 million in revenue reserves among the London boroughs of which £22.326 million in capital receipts and £8.962 million in revenue reserves has been distributed to the London borough of Barnet.

Energy Advice Centres

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the locations of each of the pilot local energy advice centres set up under the auspices of the Energy Saving Trust Ltd., to which his Department has given support; and if he will make a statement on how many further pilot centres are proposed.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The locations are listed at the end of the answer.

It is our policy to set up more pilot centres as and when suitable proposals are made to the Energy Saving trust and sufficient matching funding has been secured. Currently there are four centres which are close to being established—they are as follows:

Belfast, which is due to start work on 30 January;
Wirral, which is expecting to start work shortly; and
Orkney and Western Isles, which are hoped to be operational in the near future, once discussions about the funding arrangements have been resolved. The Energy Saving trust offered both £10,000 each in grant aid in the autumn and are waiting for the matching funding to be provided so that the two centres can be launched.

Locations of Local Energy Advice Centres
Aberdeen
Belfast–operational from 30 January 1995
Birmingham
Black Country–office in West Bromwich
Bristol
Cardiff
Coventry
Croydon
Dundee
Glasgow
Greenwich
Highland–Inverness
Islington
Leeds
Leicester
Lewisham
Lothian and Edinburgh–Edinburgh
Middlesborough
Oxford
Peterborough
Plymouth
Ryedale-Malton
Shetland–Foula
South London-closed down in October 1994.
Strathclyde–Glasgow
Swansea
Tayside–Dundee
Telford
Tyneside–Newcastle
West Wales–Newport

Water Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to discuss with the Director General of Ofwat the contracting out of sewage contracts by water companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he has had with the Director General of Ofwat about the advisability of water companies contracting out their care services of water and waste water treatment;

(2) what powers he has to prevent water companies from inviting bids to contract out their water treatment operations; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what powers he has to prevent water companies from inviting bids to contract out their waste water treatment operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The decision to contract out the maintenance and operation of services is a matter for individual water and sewerage companies.

Domestic Plumbing Systems

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has commissioned to examine the overall cost of removing lead piping from the household water systems.

Mr. Atkins: The results of research commissioned from the Water Research Centre into the cost of replacing lead pipes were reported in 1992. Copies of this report are being replaced in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to issue new regulations to control standards of work and product specifications with regard to domestic plumbing systems.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to my hon Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) on 12 January, *Official Report*, columns *174–75*.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had and from which organisations about establishing a grant-aided programme to replace lead pipes from domestic water systems; and what plans he has to do so.

Mr. Atkins: I am not aware of any representations for such a programme; I have no plans to extend the present house renovation grant.

Nuclear Waste Disposal

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution report on Crooks Marsh farm; and what is his view on its proposals to abandon plans to dispose of nuclear waste in landfill sites.

Mr. Atkins: I am not aware of any report specifically relating to Crooks Marsh farm. However, this site is referred to in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's annual monitoring report for radioactive substances 1992, a copy of which is in the library.

This site has accepted wastes from local hospitals and universities in the past, but with the transfer of the site from the county council to the Local Authority Waste Disposal Co. the disposers were informed that the site would stop accepting this type of waste.

HMIP has no proposals in respect of nuclear waste disposal in landfill sites. It would assess rigorously any application from any operation for such disposals and issue an authorisation only when it was assured of the safety of the public.

Radon Gas

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many grants the Government have given to householders affected by radon gas in each of the last five years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities may give grants to householders affected by radon gas but no information on the number of grants given is held centrally.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in Devon are affected by radon gas; and how many have been treated.

Sir Paul Beresford: The National Radiological Protection Board estimates that some 17,000 houses in Devon have radon levels in excess of the Government action level. The Department of the Environment has provided radon measurements in response to requests

from householders in approximately 58,000 homes in Devon, of which 4,150 were found to exceed the action level. The householders have been informed of their results and advised on appropriate action. It is for individual householders to decide what, if any, remedial action to take.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Merseyside development corporation will cease to exist.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Merseyside development corporation will be wound up on 31 March 1998.

Peregrines and Goshawks

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* peregrines and *(b)* goshawks were bred in captivity in each year since 1990.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer Friday 13 January 1995]:* Information available to the Department is as follows:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Peregrine[1]	269	319	290	360	289
Goshawk	79	155	141	154	116

[1] These figures include both pure-bred and hybrid birds.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid and Trade

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what trade is estimated to emanate from overseas aid to the third world in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: United Kingdom firms benefit directly from that part of the bilateral aid budget which is tied: in 1993 this was worth over £700 million. More importantly, aid supports economic growth and brings wider benefits to the UK as a major trading nation.

South Africa

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support Her Majesty's Government are currently giving to the Government of South Africa.

Mr. Baldry: We have a substantial aid programme, about £16 million this year, in the form of know-how and support to local institutions, to assist directly with the process of transition and reform. We have taken a number of initiatives to develop further our strong trade and investment links, and fund separately a programme to assist the integration of the South Africa national defence force.

Somaliland

36. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made through the work of the United Kingdom representative in Hargeisa towards developing the economy and stable government in the republic of Somaliland.

Mr. Baldry: From April last year, the ODA NGO liaison and support officer worked with international and local NGOs and the administration in Hargeisa to help to re-establish basic health and education services in the region. Unfortunately, his work was suspended in November following the outbreak of fighting.

Indonesia

37.**Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on aid policy to Indonesia.

Mr. Baldry: There is a strong economic and social case for Britain, like other major donors, to have a substantial aid programme in Indonesia. The Government of Indonesia are pursuing sound policies and have an impressive record of poverty reduction: but Indonesia still has some 27 million people living in poverty. Our aid programme is focused on human resource development, good government, the environment, power generation and transport.

International Development Association

38.**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what conditions he proposes to attach to any United Kingdom contribution to the replenishment of the International Development Association.

Mr. Baldry: During the negotiations on the 11th replenishment of the International Development Association, we will be working closely with other donors to enhance IDA's effectiveness and to strengthen its focus on poverty reduction, sound economic management and environmentally sustainable development.

Kurdistan

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support is being given to the people of Kurdistan.

Mr. Baldry: This financial year we have committed some £5.6 million for humanitarian activities in Northern Iraq.

This includes nearly £1.8 million through Save the Children Fund for village rehabilitation, £2 million through UNICEF for the provision of kerosene, and over £1.1 million through UNICEF for medical supplies and combating childhood diseases. The rest is for family support, roads, crop protection and a targeting study.

Aid and Trade Provision

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the full list of United Kingdom companies involved in the Ankara Metro project, sanctioned under the aid and trade provision, detailed in the answer to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *886*, was not included in the Library paper No. 663(3s) detailing ATP projects since 1984.

Mr. Baldry: The paper placed in the Library details ATP projects only by lead contractor. The answer referred to requested details of all United Kingdom and local companies involved in the Ankara Metro project. It is not possible to give details of all United Kingdom companies and local contractors involved in every ATP project because of the large number of companies involved. This information is not held centrally and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between the Minister for Overseas Development and agencies of the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Baldry: The ODA has one executive agency, the Natural Resources Institute. The framework of planning, control and accountability and agreed aims, objectives and activities are set out in its framework document.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who have lost entitlement to invalidity benefit have then been deemed ineligible for unemployment benefit in (i) the east midlands, (ii) Nottinghamshire and (iii) Nottingham in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Hague: The responsibilities of, and relationship between, Ministers and Department of Social Security agencies are set out in the agencies' framework documents, copies of which are in the Library.

Strathclyde Flooding

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the possession of *(a)* a bank account or *(b)* a commercial credit card will disqualify victims of the Strathclyde floods who are not in receipt of income support from securing a crisis loan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Crisis loans are available to people irrespective of whether they are in receipt of income support, to help in an emergency or a disaster, where it is the only means of preventing serious risk or damage to the applicant's or his family's health or safety.

Even where an applicant holds a credit card, or has a bank account, this need not be a barrier to making an application. Social fund officers take decisions on whether a crisis loan is payable, in doing so they consider all the circumstances surrounding the claim, including the availability of other resources to meet the need.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what investigations he *(a)* conducted and *(b)* intends to conduct to assess the needs of the Strathclyde flood victims; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Following a meeting on 15 December 1994 with the hon. Member for Paisley, South and other representatives of the Strathclyde district, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security requested daily reports from each of the five Benefits Agency districts affected, detailing social fund expenditure for the flood victims. In addition, a benefit bus visited the worst-affected areas to offer advice; staff visited the flood centres where victims were being temporarily housed to pay out some money from the social fund and the local press detailed additional funds made available by the Secretary of State from the social fund.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking, or encouraging the Benefits Agency to take, to ensure that victims of the Strathclyde floods are *(a)* not encouraged and *(b)* actively discouraged from entering into contracts with loan sharks as the means of obtaining finance to re-establish their homes and lives.

Mr. Roger Evans: Additional funds of £120,000 were made available to the Benefits Agency district offices affected, specifically to provide assistance to those people in need of help as a result of the floods. So far, 526 awards have been made—421 grants and 105 loans totalling £108,217. Loans are interest free, and repayment rates are set taking into account the circumstances of each individual case. Those people who have received repayable loans will be able to arrange a sympathetic repayment rate appropriate to their circumstances.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will meet representatives of the insurance ombudsman and the British Association of Insurers to discuss outstanding issues relating to the floods in Strathclyde during December 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend has not received a request for a meeting to discuss these issues, either from representatives of the insurance ombudsman or from the Association of British Insurers.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will detail the eligibility criteria applicable to victims of the Strathclyde floods who make application for *(a)* crisis loans and *(b)* grant assistance in respect of (i) immediate help to deal with the aftermath of flooding, (ii) help with making temporary accommodation habitable and (iii) help with establishing permanent accommodation as a warm, dry, comfortable home; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assistance is available to Strathclyde flood victims who are *(a)* in receipt of income support and *(b)* not in receipt of income support for domestic fuel bills which are higher than normal due to the additional heating required to (i) dry out flooded homes, (ii) heat temporary accommodation, (iii) heat temporary accommodation while at the same time drying out flooded homes and (iv) make a realistic contribution to the additional fuel costs of host relatives or friends while continuing to pay the fuel costs of drying out flooded homes; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will detail the assistance available from the Benefits Agency for victims of the Strathclyde floods in respect of *(a)* immediate help to deal with the aftermath, *(b)* help with making temporary accommodation habitable and *(c)* help with establishing permanent accommodation as a warm, dry comfortable home for (i) people in receipt of income support and (ii) people not in receipt of income support; if he will also detail the particular help which might be available to people in both categories during all of the three phases, who are (1) insured and (2) not insured; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Disaster relief following flooding is essentially a matter for the relevant local authority. However, people receiving income support are eligible to apply for community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans from the social fund. Those people not receiving income support can apply for a crisis loan. Whether an applicant can receive a payment from the social fund is a matter for specially trained social fund officers to decide, using the Secretary of State's directions and guidance, area social fund officer guidance and their discretion. So far, 526 awards have been made—421 grants and 105 loans totalling £108,217.

Community care grants help those who might otherwise be in danger of going into care; or families who find themselves under exceptional pressure. Budgeting loans help spread the cost of expenses which may be difficult to meet from weekly benefit. Crisis loans are available to anyone in an emergency or a crisis, where they have no other means of preventing serious risk or damage to the health or safety of themselves or a member of their family. Social fund officers will consider whether other help is available, including money from insurance policies.

Awards made from the social fund to the flood victims may include help to meet immediate needs following the floods; pay higher domestic fuel bills incurred as a result of the floods and provide household items required to make their temporary and permanent home habitable.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will appoint named officers, at appropriately senior level, in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Benefits Agency to be responsible for all phases of assistance available to victims of the Stathclyde floods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency's area director for the Glasgow and Paisley area, Mr. Archie Roy, is responsible for ensuring that all claims to the social fund from victims of the Strathclyde floods are properly dealt with and for liaison, as necessary, with the Department.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will detail the specific assistance which is available to claimants of the mobility or motability schemes who lost vehicles under water in the Strathclyde floods of December 1994, with particular reference to eligibility for assistance under the loss of use scheme; what particular assistance is available to participating claimants who owned, rather than leased, their vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: Motability is an independent organisation. The administration of the scheme is wholly a matter for Motability and any questions on this issue should be directed to the director, Mr. Simon Willis.

Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will meet the hon. Member for Paisley, South to discuss the provisions of the Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the hon. Member last month to discuss what help the Department could provide to assist those people affected by the flooding in Strathclyde.

If the hon. Member has further concerns, my right hon. Friend would be happy to consider a request for a second meeting.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of benefit savings to date since 1 April 1994 resulting from *(a)* non-maintenance cessations of benefit and *(b)* savings in housing benefit and council tax benefit, following action by the Child Support Agency, calculated on the same basis as the figures given in the letter of 5 July 1994 from the chief executive of the Child Support Agency, published in the Minutes of Evidence of the Social Security Committee, HC 470–iv, Session 1993–94, appendix 2, page 103.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 13 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about benefit savings following action by the Child Support Agency.

From April 1994 to October 1994, benefit savings resulting from non-maintenance cessations in cases where the parent with care withdraws a claim to income support totalled £124 million.

The consequential savings in Housing and Council Tax Benefit are calculated retrospectively after the end of the financial year from returns provided by local authorities.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sport

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to ensure an integrated approach to sport following the severing of links between the east midlands regional council for sport and recreation and the English Sports Council.

Mr. Sproat: The Sports Council's regional offices will continue to work closely with a wide range of regional parties in furtherance of the council's particular national policy objectives. The regional offices will also wish to maintain close links with local authorities and regional sporting interests as those agencies develop their own wider strategies for general leisure provisions.

Children's Play

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what financial commitments he has made towards resourcing children's play in future years.

Mr. Sproat: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are currently considering the responses to our current consultation exercise on children's play and will

be announcing our conclusions in due course along with their financial implications.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for National heritage how much money was allocated by his Department to children's play in the years, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Sproat: As part of its annual grant in aid, the Sports Council received earmarked funding for children's play totalling £4.2 million over the period 1987–88 to 1992–93, an average of £700,000 a year. Following the closure of the national children's play and recreation unit in March 1993, it has been for the Sports Council to determine its expenditure on children's play within the overall resources available to it.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department is responsible for two agencies, Historic Royal Palaces and the Royal Parks. The division of responsibilities and relationship between Ministers and the agencies is set out in their respective framework documents, copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Royal Property

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what different ownership arrangements apply to *(a)* Buckingham palace, *(b)* Windsor castle, *(c)* Sandringham and *(d)* Balmoral; and what public ownership exists in respect of them.

Mr. Sproat: Buckingham palace and Windsor castle are vested in the sovereign in right of crown. Sandringham and Balmoral are privately owned by the Queen.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the latest estimate of the total sum expected to come from public funds for the repairs arising from the fire at Windsor castle.

Mr. Sproat: It is at present estimated that the cost of the Windsor restoration will be about £35 million, of which £10.5 million will be met from public funds.

WALES

Labour Statistics

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most recent percentage figures of unemployment in Newport, Gwent and Wales.

Mr. Redwood: In November 1994, the adjusted, workforce-based unemployment rates were 9 per cent. in both the Newport travel-to-work area and Gwent; and 8.7 per cent. in Wales.

Voluntary Organisations (Grants)

14. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the value of grants from his Department to voluntary organisations in each of the past three years.

Mr. Richards: The latest available figures at outturn prices for direct grants are £10.4 million for 1991–92, £12.3 million for 1992–93 and £14.1 million for 1993–94.

Departmental Priorities

15. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his Department's priorities for 1995.

Mr. Redwood: Details will be in the Welsh Office departmental report, but some of my main priorities are: to further enhance the competitiveness of Welsh industry; to attract more private investment; to press on with work to dual the A465 and the A55 across Anglesey; to reduce waiting times in the NHS and to increase spending on direct patient care; to secure a smooth transition to the new structure of local government; to implement fully the revised national curriculum and develop pupil assessment; and to extend modern and accelerated apprenticeships.

Countryside Council for Wales

16. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales to discuss the council's budget for the next financial year.

Mr. Redwood: I met Mr. Michael Griffith, chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales, to discuss the review of his organisation and its budget on Tuesday 10 January 1995.

Welsh Development Agency

17. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest estimate of the capital and revenue spending of the Welsh Development Agency for 1994–95; how much of this is funded by the sale of Welsh Development Agency assets; and what were the corresponding figures for 1993–94.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Latest estimates of capital and revenue spending in 1994–95 are £122 million and £38 million respectively. The agency expects to generate £60 million in receipts from the sale of assets.

In 1993–94, corresponding outturn figures were: capital spend—£111.733 million; current spend—£39.923 million; and receipts from the sale of assets—£45.548 million.

Private Health Facilities

18. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for promoting the extension of private health facilities in the NHS in Wales.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend and I wish to encourage the private sector to provide new facilities within which the NHS can provide clinical services.

Private Sector Finance Initiative

19. **Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made with the private sector finance initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Considerable progress is being made across many of my Department's programmes. I have already announced plans to attract £1,000 million private investment to the south Wales valleys and am looking to secure another £1,000 million for Cardiff bay.

General Hospitals

20. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to protect the position of smaller district general hospitals.

Mr. Richards: Any substantial change in the use of a hospital requires extensive public consultation before it can be put into effect. If the proposals for change do not secure the backing of local community health councils in particular, they must be referred to my right hon. Friend for a decision.

Workers (Licensed Mines)

21. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many workers are employed in licensed mines in South Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I understand there were around 720 employees as at 1 September 1994.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the development of NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. Richards: There are currently 24 operational NHS trust in Wales. My right hon. Friend and I have received five applications from hospitals, community units and the ambulance service to become NHS trusts from April 1995. Public consultation on three of the applications ended on 4 December 1994.

In the light of the representations received, and taking account of the individual merits of each application, my right hon. Friend and I have decided to establish a further three NHS trusts to become operational from next April. The details are

South Glamorgan Health Authority

South Glamorgan Dental Hospital and School, Cardiff

South Glamorgan Community/Priority Services Unit, Cardiff

Ambulance Service

East Dyfed and West Glamorgan Ambulance Services

The orders giving effect to my decisions have been signed today. The trusts will be formally established on 6 February 1995 with an operational date of 1 April 1995. We will announce shortly the details on the chairmen and non-executive directors of the new NHS trusts.

The University hospital of Wales and Cardiff Royal group and the West Glamorgan east unit (Neath and Port Talbot) district services unit, jointly, have also applied for NHS trust status from April 1995. Both applications are currently subject to three months public consultation. We expect to announce the outcome during February.

This announcement today means that, from April 1995, some 95 per cent. of acute and community services and 100 per cent. of ambulance services in Wales will be delivered by NHS trusts.

Road Schemes (Property Acquisition)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated value of those properties purchased by, and currently owned by, his Department prior to the building of road schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The estimated disposable value of land and property acquired in advance of proposed trunk road schemes which is, or will eventually be, surplus to requirements is £4.5 million.

Non-departmental Executive Posts

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the policy regarding the number of non-departmental executive posts that can be held by individuals.

Mr. Redwood: In making public appointments, I take account of any existing appointments held by the prospective appointee, to ensure that the total time commitment is not excessive.

Abattoirs

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was *(a)* the total capacity and *(b)* the total number of abattoirs in Wales in 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994; and how many abattoirs in Wales now conform to the requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of licensed red meat abattoirs in Wales was 79 in 1979, 70 in 1984, 66 in 1989 and 39 in 1994.

In 1994, all 39 abattoirs were licensed under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992; 33 were operating under temporary derogations while upgrading their premises to comply in full with the structural regulations.

The Welsh Office does not hold figures on the total capacity of abattoirs.

Consultation Papers

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many consultation papers issued by Government Departments inviting views on matters relating to England and Wales have not been issued in Wales by his Department in each of the last five years, specifying the consultation papers and the reasons for not consulting on the same basis in Wales;

(2) how many consultation papers issued by the Department of the Environment inviting views on matters

relating to England and Wales have not been issued in Wales by his Department in each of the last five years, specifying the consultation papers and the reasons for not consulting on the same basis in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he has made for contacting and counselling those who have received blood transfusions contaminated with hepatitis C; what representations he has received concerning such an information programme; what consultation he has had with the board of management of National Blood Transfusion Service Wales on this issue; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Government have asked the chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues for Transplantation to set up a United Kingdom working party of experts to draw up guidance to undertake the "look back" programme and to inform the counselling of those identified as being at risk. Guidance on the treatment options available will also be provided. The National Blood Transfusion Service for Wales will implement the "look back" programme to identify those who may have been inadvertently infected by blood collected by the Welsh transfusion centre. The managers of the Welsh Transfusion Service have been kept fully informed of this process.

No representations have been received concerning the "look back" programme.

School Meals

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pupils aged under seven years, seven to 11 years, and over 11 years respectively, in each local education authority area in Wales receive school meals, and free school meals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Data on school meals are not collected by age. The number of pupils receiving school meals in each local education authority area in Wales as at January 1994, by sector, was:

	Primary schools		*Secondary schools*	
	Paid meals	*Free meals*	*Paid meals*	*Free meals*
Clwyd	9,470	6,570	7,693	2,862
Dyfed	13,950	6,201	11,476	2,875
Gwent	13,406	10,744	11,230	4,378
Gwynedd	7,740	4,111	5,111	1,736
Mid Glamorgan	19,637	15,726	11,809	6,612
Powys	5,844	1,212	3,523	405
South Glamorgan	9,973	10,125	5,377	3,762
West Glamorgan	9,917	8,173	9,313	3,789
Wales	89,937	62,862	65,532	26,419

Environmental Education

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what preparation he is making to implement the recommendation of the Toyne report on the commissioning of a national appraisal of the progress made in the further and higher education sector in the development of environmental education.

Mr. Richards: The Toyne report recommended that the Welsh Office and the Department for Education commission a national appraisal not later than the 1995–96 academic year. It is intended that the appraisal will take place in the 1995–96 academic year.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bromley (Fraud)

25.**Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Attorney-General if charges have now been brought in respect of the allegations of fraud in the environmental health department of the London borough of Bromley.

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service considered the results of inquiries into allegations concerning the environmental health department of the London borough of Bromley and concluded that the evidence was insufficient to justify criminal proceedings against any person.

Crown Prosecution Service

28.**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the efficiency of the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General: The performance of the Crown Prosecution Service is monitored at regular meetings between the law officers and the director of Public Prosecutions. The service handles about 1.5 million cases per year, with a conviction rate in the year to September 1994 of 97.7 per cent. in magistrates' courts and 90.3 per cent. in the Crown court.

Lenient Sentences

29.**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Attorney-General in how many cases where he has referred a sentence to the Court of Appeal as being unduly lenient, the sentence has been increased.

The Attorney-General: Since 1989, 189 offenders have had their sentences referred to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient. Some 19 cases were subsequently withdrawn. Of the 161 cases that have been heard, 132, or 82 per cent. resulted in an increased sentence.

HEALTH

Staffing

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average qualified nurse to patient ratio in each of the last five years by region.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 18 April 1994, *Official Report*, column *401*, for the years 1989–90 to 1992–93. Information for 1993–94 is shown in the table. Community nursing figures, which increased from 29,870 in 1987 to 37,520 in 1993—25.6 per cent.—have not been included in the qualified

nursing and midwifery totals as community patient data is not collected centrally. Figures for qualified staff show all qualified nursing and midwifery staff, including senior nurses and midwives but excluding those nurses who have transferred to senior management terms but still have a clinical role to play, but who cannot be identified separately from other senior managers. It also excludes pre and post-registration learners and Project 2000 nursing students, those nurses employed through an agency or bank arrangements.

Qualified nurses and midwives excluding community and agency staff by region-England 30 September total in-patient finished consultant episodes

Year 1993–94

	Qualified nursing and midwifery staff WTEs (excluding community)	*Ordinary admissions*
Northern	15,450	556,147
Yorkshire	16,270	653,378
Trent	18,990	764,167
East Anglia	8,430	334,967
NW Thames	12,860	451,670
NE Thames	15,870	615,132
SE Thames	13,850	565,347
SW Thames	12,030	438,731
Wessex	12,650	491,997
Oxford	9,980	374,205
South Western	14,160	564,886
West Midlands	21,750	869,994
Mersey	10,600	450,427
Northern Western	19,010	757,915
Total	201,890	7,888,963

Source:
KM70 and NHS Non-Medical Census.
Notes:
1. "Ordinary Admissions" is the term used for "In-Patient consultant episodes".
2. Ordinary Admissions are taken for the year 1 April to 31 March.
3. Qualified Nursing and Midwifery Staff are as at 30 September-ie. for the 1989–90 year the figure is as at 30 September 1989.

NHS Resources

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a paper giving a breakdown of the cash sum attached to each of the health programmes mentioned in annexe 4 to the NHS executive's recent publication "HCHS Resource Allocation: Weighted Capitation Formula" by each of the age groups in table 1 of this publication, using the methods described in annexe 3 of this publication.

Mr. Sackville: The information will be placed in the Library. Hospital and community health service expenditure by age group is not routinely available and has been estimated separately for each programme using data from the latest HCHS programme budgets and separate records of patient activity by age.

Heart Valves

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who requested 42 heart valves for use in clinical trials in the United Kingdom; and from whom;

(2) when the request was made to the United States of America for the use of heart valves in clinical trials.

Mr. Sackville: Shiley requested permission from the United States Food and Drug Administration to export Björk-Shiley 70° C-C heart valves from the United States of America for use in clinical trials in the United Kingdom. The Medical Devices Agency has no record of the date of this request. In response to a request from Shiley, dated 25 February 1981, the Department of Health issued a letter on 27 March 1981, indicating no objection to importation of the valve for clinical trial purposes.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information was given to patients implanted with heart valves in the course of the clinical trials.

Mr. Sackville: The information given to patients before and during the course of a clinical trial is a matter for the professional judgment of the clinicians involved, taking into account the particular circumstances of each patient and the requirements of the clinical trial protocol.

Health and Safety

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to ensure that the 1993 legislation on health and safety in the workplace has been implemented in the national health service and social services departments.

Mr. Malone: The implementation of health and safety legislation is entirely the responsibility of national health service employers. The NHS executive guidance, "Health and Safety at Work—(EL(93)66)", issued on 29 July 1993, drew the attention of NHS employers specifically to the health and safety regulations introduced in 1993. In addition, the NHS executive's guidance on "Occupational Health Services for NHS Staff (HSG(94)51)", issued to NHS employers on 6 December 1994, underlined the statutory responsibility of NHS employers including that under the 1993 health and safety legislation. Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Social services departments are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is responsible for matters relating to local government.

District Nurses

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the effects of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 upon the work of district nurses.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Each locality will have different health needs and these will be reflected in the work of the district nurse and other health professionals. It is for local employers of district nurses to continually assess and review their work with them.

Manpower Control

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when manpower control in respect of medical staff was discontinued; and what statistics exist on medical manpower distribution in England *(a)* at that date and *(b)* currently.

Mr. Malone: Medical manpower control has not been discontinued. Senior registrar and career registrar quotas are still in operation as set by the Joint Planning Advisory Committee. The number of pre-registration house officer posts is still controlled through negotiation with the Joint Consultants Committee; staff grade posts are controlled by the Advisory Group on Medical Education, Training and Staffing; appointments to the associate specialist grade are personal regradings, and are monitored by AGMETS. Responsibility for senior house officer post numbers has been devolved to task forces and postgraduate deans, but only in respect of reducing junior doctors' hours. There are no controls on consultant or other non-consultant career grades not mentioned above.

Statistics on medical manpower distribution in England are collected by specialty and region and are published annually in the medical and dental manpower census.

Obstetric Beds

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of obstetric beds in Northumberland health authority in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The number of beds is not collected centrally by specialty.

Consultant Vacancies

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant vacancies are currently unfilled in the Northumberland district health authority; and how many of these have been unfilled for more than 12 months.

Mr. Malone: Latest figures available are for 30 September 1993 and show no consultant vacancies in Northumberland district health authority.

Fluorosis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to maintain records centrally by regional health authority on the number of reported cases of fluorosis; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: We have no plans to collect this information.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women in the northern region have died from cervical cancer in each year since 1987.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is available in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publication series DH5—"Mortality statistics by area"—copies of which are available in the Library.

Meningitis

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of meningitis have been reported in the Northern regional health authority and Northumberland health authority areas in each year since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Notifications of all Meningitis and Meningococcal Meningitis in Northern Regional Health Authority and Northumberland District Health Authority, 1988–92

Year	*Northern RHA*		*Northumberland DHA*	
	All meningitis	*Meningococcal meningitis*	*All meningitis*	*Meningococcal meningitis*
1988	166	72	4	0
1989	147	59	11	3
1990	146	76	3	1
1991	192	79	11	9
1992	193	93	25	7

General Practitioners

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the computer allowance for general practitioners in Sunderland who are *(a)* fundholders and *(b)* non fundholders.

Mr. Malone: The national scheme for reimbursing general practitioners all or part of their costs in purchasing computer hardware and software, subject to the overall cash limited allocation given to family health services authorities, is as follows:

For equipment to support general medical services—up to 50 per cent. of costs incurred. For specialised equipment to support fundholding—up to 75 per cent. of hardware costs and up to 100 per cent. of software costs.

Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons the report of the homeless mentally ill initiative was ordered to be rewritten by her Department; what was the initial proposal for the number of new permanent homes with care provision and the one in the rewritten version; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: No order has been given by my Department to rewrite any report on the homeless mentally ill initiative.

Patients, Walthamstow

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been removed from general practitioners' lists in Walthamstow in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Malone: The information requested is available only by family health services authority area and is included in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1269*.

NHS Trusts, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, for each of the NHS trusts within Doncaster health authority areas those non-executive directors who live *(a)* within and *(b)* outside the boundaries of the Doncaster health authority.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 2 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1230–31*.

Patients Charter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the maximum interval between general practitioner referral and the first out-patient appointment offered under the patients charter.

Mr.Malone: We will shortly be announcing the first-ever national standard for the maximum wait for a first out-patient appointment.

Breast Screening

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to improve quality in the breast screening programme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service breast screening programme is achieving good results in terms of screening coverage and of cancers detected. The Public Accounts Committee has praised the programme and singled it out as an example on which any future health screening programmes should be modelled. The programme is achieving targets set for it in terms of women taking up screening appointments and numbers of cancers detected.

One of the main strengths of the programme lies in its robust quality assurance systems, which have identified a higher-than-expected rate of breast cancers being detected in the interval between screening appointments. In order to enhance further the sensitivity of breast screening and to ensure that we detect more cancers at an early stage, the Department of Health is taking action to:

require two views to be taken of each breast for all women being screened for the first time in the future. Research evidence produced from within the NHS breast screening programme shows that this will increase the number of cancers detected;

require screening centres to increase the optical density (contrast) of mammograms. Research from within the screening programme has shown that when pictures of the breast are darker, small cancers can be detected more easily; and

ensure the provision of focused clinical update training for radiologists to improve further the detection of particular types of cancers which are proving most difficult to see on mammograms.

An executive letter setting out this action in more detail will be sent to health authorities within the next few weeks.

Community Care

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss the community care changes; what representations were made to her; what action she is taking; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I met representatives of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and other local authority associations on 16 June 1994. Department of Health Ministers and officials regularly meet them to discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has had from Lancashire county council to meet her about the funding of "Care in the Community" in the county; and what plans she has to meet them.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *207*.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish *(a)* the report into the London ambulance service, *(b)* the results of the review of weighted capitation and *(c)* the results of the Inner London health authority chief executive's bed survey; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The report into the London ambulance service was published on 10 January 1995. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The weighted capitation formula was reviewed in 1994 and guidance—FDL(94)68—as well as a booklet entitled "Hospital and Community Health Services. Revenue Resource Allocation: Weighted Capitation Formula" are available in the Library.

We understand that the Inner London health authorities will publish their acute bed study shortly.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number and percentage of emergency ambulance calls in the London area that took (1) 14 minutes, (2) 15 minutes, (3) 16 minutes, (4) 17 minutes, (5) 18 minutes, (6) 19 minutes, (7) 20 minutes, (8) 21 minutes, (9) 22 minutes, (10) 23 minutes, (11) 24 minutes, (12) 25 minutes, (13) 26 minutes, (14) 27 minutes, (15) 28 minutes, (16) 29 minutes, (17) 30 minutes, (18) 31 minutes, (19) 32 minutes, (20) 33 minutes, (21) 34 minutes, (22) 35 minutes, (23) 26 minutes, (24) 37 minutes, (25) 38 minutes, (26) 39 minutes and (27) 40 minutes during *(a)* November 1994, *(b)* December 1994, and *(c)* in total since April 1994.

Mr. Sackville: Information supplied by the London ambulance service will be placed in the Library.

The LAS responded to 7,231 more calls within 14 minutes in November 1994 compared with November 1993.

The information for December 1994 is not yet available.

Patient Lists

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *400*, when comparable information for 1993–94 on patient lists will be available.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 28 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *537*. The data are still being collated and a copy will be placed in the House Library when available.

Blood

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to reply to the letter from the

hon. Member for Oxford, East of November 1994, relating to the National Blood Authority's new targets for national blood stocks; what assessment she has made of the possibility of surplus blood being thrown away; and what consideration underlay the additional £10,000 allocated to the advertising budget of each blood centre.

Mr. Sackville: I replied on 12 January 1995.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to be able to reply to a letter from the hon. Member for Oxford, East of 2 December 1994, relating to the sale of blood voluntarily donated.

Mr. Sackville: I replied on 9 January 1995.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) pursuant to the oral answer of the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) of 13 December 1994, *Official Report*, column 770, what proposals the Government have to privatised the National Blood Transfusion Service;

(2) what level of savings she expects from the establishment of the new National Blood Authority headquarters at Watford and the proposed zonal management structure;

(3) what steps she is taking to restore confidence in the public and the Blood Transfusion Service work force following the recent reductions in the level of blood donated.

Mr. Sackville: There is no intention to privatise the National Blood Service or any part of the National Blood Authority. The NBA was established to develop and manage a fully co-ordinated blood service in England.

The authority undertook a radical review of the structure and operation of the network of regional transfusion centres. The object of the review was to produce a safe, high-quality and cost-effective blood service. The proposals from the review were put out for consultation and these are now being reviewed in the light of the comments received. The NBA has announced arrangements to confirm that the comments have been taken fully into account. Savings are envisaged from implementation of the final proposals but can be precisely determined only when these emerge.

The authority has continued effectively to co-ordinate and manage the blood supply during this period. Levels of donations are generally adequate to meet demand from hospitals, which indicates public confidence in the service. Isolated and localised temporary shortages have occurred, as they always have done at various times of the year. The response of donors to appeals at these times also confirms that the service retains public confidence. The creation of a national authority has, for the first time, provided the opportunity for a planned approach to the supply of blood across the country.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give *(a)* the date when blood products from the United Kingdom were first exported, *(b)* the destination of exported blood products, *(c)* the description of all blood products exported, *(d)* the annual value of exported blood products, *(e)* the current level of stocks of blood compared with current targets and *(f)* the current method used for transporting blood products and the safeguards employed.

Mr. Sackville: The Bio Products Laboratory has been exporting surplus products since before 1986. These products have consisted largely of albumin and albumin intermediates, together with small quantities of a range of other products such as factor IX and factor XI as well as some immunoglobulin. Products are exported worldwide. BPL products are categorised as ethical pharmaceuticals and are transported in appropriate containers. The value of these exports has never exceeded £5 million in any one year.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the compliance by the National Blood Authority with *(a)* the relevant NHS tendering and contracting requirements and *(b)* its own standing financial instructions before the appointment of Bain and Co. to carry out the review of the Blood Transfusion Service; and if she will list the dates when the invitations to tender were notified in the journal of the European Community.

Mr. Sackville: We are informed by the National Blood Authority that the requirements of national health service procedures and the authority's own standing financial instructions were complied with during the tendering for management consultants. The invitations to tender were issued in May 1993 before the European Community public services directive relating to the award of public service contracts came into force.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons only blood products destined for export are tested for alanine aminotransferase; and if these products test positive for aminotransferase other cellular products from those donations are prohibited for use on United Kingdom patients.

Mr. Sackville: No blood collected by the National Blood Service or blood products produced by the Bio Products Laboratory are tested for alanine aminotransferase.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the cost of a computer system for the National Blood Service.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the National Blood Authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Sir Colin Walker OBE, for details.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many units of blood were transferred between blood transfusion centres in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994 in response to unexpected shortfalls in supply.

Mr. Sackville: The creation of a national authority has, for the first time, provided the opportunity for a planned approach to the supply of blood across the country. It is not possible to identify separately stock transfers between centres to alleviate temporary shortages and those undertaken as part of good stock management practice to reduce wastage. More than 2 million donations are collected each year. In 1993, there were 32,645 units transferred between centres and in 1994, 59,880 units. This reflects more effective management of blood stocks evidenced by a general reduction in wastage rates.

Dental Services

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's assessment of the number of dentists who are refusing to undertake work under the national health service.

Mr. Malone: Dentists are independent contractors who are free to undertake national health service work, private work or a mixture of the two. At 30 September 1994 there were 15,885 dentists under contract to family health service authorities in England, the highest September

quarter figure ever. Family health service authorities in England report that they can help patients to find national health service dentists.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have given written notice to each family health service authority to remove their name from the dental list since July 1994.

Mr. Malone: The information will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have been added to the dental lists for each family health service authority since July 1994.

Mr. Malone: This information is expected to be available in February, when it will be placed in the Library.

Psychiatric Units

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to ensure that full emergency cover is available in residential psychiatric units; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The responsibility for ensuring that residential psychiatric units are adequately staffed to cover emergencies rests with the managers of individual units. Where health authorities and local authorities are purchasing services from residential psychiatric units, they should satisfy themselves that satisfactory arrangements exist to deal with emergencies, as part of the contracting process.

Private and voluntary homes providing residential care or nursing care for people with psychiatric illnesses are required to register with the relevant local authority or health authority. The authority must be satisfied that the home's staffing arrangements, including those for emergency cover, are adequate before approving registration.

Insulin

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost per vial *(a)* of human and *(b)* of animal insulin.

Mr. Sackville: The prices per 10 mililitre vial range from £5.78 to £11.57 for animal insulin and £9.47 to £9.98 for human insulin.

Software

Mr Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the terms of the licence given by her Department to ICL to produce the software application IRC-PAS.

Mr. Sackville: The principal terms are:

copyright to remain with the Crown
ICL would develop and market the IRC-PAS
agreement to quality of service guarantees
limitation on charges that could be made.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will own the copyright of the software application OPEN-PAS produced by ICL as a successor to IRC-PAS.

Mr. Sackville: The copyright will remain with the Crown.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tendering procedures were carried out by her Department before the ICL PAS system was accepted.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not carry out any tendering for PAS systems. It is the responsibility of health authorities and trusts to tender for PAS systems, following central procurement guidance which conforms with United Kingdom, European Union and GATT regulations.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the total cost per NHS unit of the licence to operate IRC-PAS paid to ICL, *(b)* the total cost to the NHS of the licence to operate IRC-PAS paid to ICL, *(c)* the length of contract given to ICL to provide software to the NHS, and *(d)* the tendering which was carried out in respect of ICL's re-written software application, OPEN-PAS.

Mr. Sackville: The cost per site per unit is subject to contract between the individual sites and ICL. The Department does not keep separate records of these contracts. Figures showing total moneys paid to the various PAS suppliers are not maintained centrally. The initial licence to ICL was granted for five years. This has since been extended to 25 years. There was no tendering carried out in respect of OPEN-PAS as the right to develop was encompassed within the licence to ICL.

Research Units

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each of the research units which have been subject to peer review, mentioned in her answer of 30 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *674*, the date of the site visit, the date when the report of the review was sent to the unit, the date when a decision was made about the future of the unit and whether the Department will continue the unit and the date on which the unit's current contract ends.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply, I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) on 12 January, *Official Report*, columns *171–72*. All the units have current contracts which will be renewed over the coming months. The dates of the site visits and when the report were sent to the units are given in the table.

	Site visit	*Report to unit*
Dartington Social Research Unit	April 1994	July 1994
Personal Social Services Research Unit	April 1994	September 1994
Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit	October 1993	April 1994
Clinical Operational Research Unit	November 1993	April 1994
Social Medicine and Health Services Research Unit	July 1993	January 1994
Thomas Coram Research Unit	March 1994	July 1994
Centre for Primary Care Research	July 1993	November 1993
National Institute for Social Work	October 1993	March 1994
Childhood Cancer Research Group	October 1991	September 1992

	Site visit	Report to unit
National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit	June 1993	November 1993
Medical Care Research Unit	October 1992	January 1993
Centre for Health Economics	July 1994	*
Social Policy Research Unit	January 1994	July 1994

* To be sent this month.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made in the establishment of the pilot research centre in Manchester referred to in her answer of 15 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *811*; how many academic and non-academic staff were in post on 1 December; how many of these had contracts of *(a)* three years or less, *(b)* four or five years and *(c)* more than five years in duration; and who were the members of the steering group established to oversee the work of the centre and its terms of reference.

Mr. Malone: Very good progress is being made in establishing the Manchester centre for research and development in primary health care. The Department's director of research and development will shortly be writing to a number of academic and service advisors inviting them to serve as members of the steering group for the centre. The terms of reference for the steering group will be agreed at the first meeting. The numbers of staff employed at the centre, and the terms and conditions of their individual contracts, are matters for the University of Manchester as their employer.

Maternity Facilities

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) where in the North Worcestershire NHS trust area maternity facilities are currently available; where she expects them to be available by 1 January 1996; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will make it her policy to ensure that the procedure used by North Worcestershire health authority in connection with the refusal to open maternity facilities at Kidderminster general hospital is not followed elsewhere; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Provision of maternity services for the residents of north Worcestershire is the responsibility of North Worcestershire health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. M. R. Cooper, chairman of the authority, for details of local facilities. Proposals for future maternity services in the area will be the subject of a formal public consultation exercise.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement as to the procedures required of NHS trusts prior to closure of maternity units at community and district hospitals respectively.

Mr. Sackville: Health authorities; but not national health service trusts, are required to consult their local community health councils when substantial changes in local services are under consideration. However, as a matter of course, NHS trusts discuss proposed service changes with the relevant health authority and other purchasers. If appropriate, the health authority would then consult the relevant CHC.

Patient Administration Systems

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of contracts for patient administration systems have been awarded to *(a)* ICL and *(b)* other companies.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not available centrally. It is for local managers to decide which patient administration system best meets their requirements.

Human Tissue

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what safeguards are in place to prevent infection from lethal transmissible diseases occurring as a result of the transportation into the United Kingdom of amniotic fluids, blood samples, and human tissues;

(2) what records are kept by her Department of the import into the country of human tissue samples through *(a)* Heathrow airport, *(b)* other airports and *(c)* other terminals;

(3) what examination is undertaken of imported human tissue for HIV-AIDS and hepatitis B and EB;

(4) what proposal she has to control the import of human tissues from south-east Asia;

(5) what precautions are in place for workers at points of entry into the United Kingdom in respect of possible infection from the import of amniotic fluids, blood samples and human tissues.

Mr. Sackville: For pathology samples transported by air, compliance with the International Air Transport Association restricted articles regulations is needed, together with compliance with any additional requirements of individual carriers. For the importation, transportation and handling of certain pathogens listed in the Health and Safety (Dangerous Pathogens) Regulations 1981, all the provisions of which have today been subsumed into the new Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994, prior notification to the Health and Safety Executive and health Ministers is required. Further regulations apply to the transportation of the samples from the point of entry to the receiving laboratory, including, as appropriate, Post Office regulations and the Health and Safety Executive's Regulations on the Classification, Packaging and Labelling of Dangerous Goods for Carriage by Road and Rail 1994. Laboratories will carry out tests in accordance with the sender's request, and in so doing will observe Health Service Advisory Committee guidance on safe working and the prevention of infection in clinical laboratories, and guidance prepared by the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens. In all work situations, the potential for exposure to infection from material either in transit or under examination has to be assessed under COSHH and the appropriate safe working procedures adopted.

Information is not available centrally on the quantity of pathology samples sent from abroad, and in the light of the safeguards which apply we have no proposals to introduce further controls.

Mental Health Policy

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to *(a)* transfer responsibility for the monitoring and for the development of mental health policy from her Department to the NHS Executive and *(b)* divide responsibility for the monitoring and development

of mental health policy between a health care and social care division within a restructed Department of Health.

Mr. Sackville: To help the Department of Health pursue its key objectives, it is being restructed into three main business areas—the NHS Executive, the public health group and the social care group. Each one is an integral part of the Department and will advise Ministers on the full cycle of policy development, implementation, monitoring and review within its field.

As now, business areas will co-ordinate the advice to Ministers which they take decisions. In the case of mental health policy, the NHS Executive will have an explicit responsibility to ensure that such advice is properly co-ordinated.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she has made to *(a)* "Creating Community Care", the report of the Mental Health Foundation inquiry into community care for people with severe mental illness, *(b)* "Finding a Place", a review of mental health services for adults, the report of the Audit Commission and *(c)* the memorandum to the Secretary of State for Health on the Mental Health Act 1983 submitted by the Mental Health Act Commission.

Mr. Bowis: Statements were published on 7 September and 26 October representing a response to *(a)* and *(b)*. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health replied direct to the Mental Health Act Commission and responded in a letter sent to her by the chairman.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount of the NHS budget allocated to mental health listed as totals for each hospital, unit trust, organisation and charity funded through the NHS.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in the form requested. I am not aware of any unit trusts involved in this area.

David Falconer

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the circumstances of the death of David Falconer on 6 July 1994 in the Edith Mortan psychiatric centre in Torbay.

Mr. Bowis: David Falconer died of asphyxiation on 6 July 1994 while being controlled and restrained by nurses following the administration of medication which was given because of his extremely disturbed behaviour. Mr. Falconer suffered from neuroleptic malignancy syndrome which can result in adverse reaction to some medication. The doctor who gave the medication was aware of his condition.

Following an inquest into the circumstances surrounding his death, a jury returned a verdict of misadventure.

The South Devon healthcare trust commissioned Sir Louis Blom-Cooper to carry out a wide-ranging review of mental health services which was published in April 1994, the recommendations of which are a matter for the trust.

Research Units

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to establish any further research centres, as are referred to in her answer of 15 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *811;* what criteria she will use in making a decision; and whether she will await the evaluation of the first pilot centre before making any further decisions.

Mr. Malone: The option for a second centre is still under consideration.

Mental Health Care

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many officials in her Department are wholly or primarily employed to develop and monitor policy on mental health care.

Mr. Sackville: Including professional and administrative staff, some of whom work part-time, 43 officials.

NHS Executive Report

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the costs of *(a)* producing, *(b)* printing and *(c)* distributing the 1993–94 annual report of the NHS Executive; how many copies were printed; and how many were distributed to (i) the press, (ii) the NHS and (iii) others.

Mr. Sackville: The National Health Service Executive annual report provides public information about the performance of the NHS, and plays an important role in ensuring that the service remains accountable.

The information requested about the cost of NHS Executive annual report 1993–94 is:

	£
a. Production	37,099
b. Printing	20,739
c. Distribution	3,748

A total of 20,000 copies of the report were printed. Since publication, approximately 200 copies have been available to the press, 4,100 distributed within the NHS and approximately 2,500 distributed to others. The report will remain available to the public throughout the year via the health literature line, and will be distributed further within the NHS at health service conferences.

Death Rates

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the death rates for *(a)* each local health authority, *(b)* each regional health authority and *(c)* nationally in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The crude death rates—deaths per 1,000 population—for each district health authority, each regional health authority and for England and Wales will be placed in the Library.

"Achieving a Balance"

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the year of the "Achieving a Balance" agreement; what was the percentage expansion of consultants agreed upon, and the percentage expansion, in each year since the agreement; how many whole-time equivalent consultants there were in the NHS in the year when "Achieving a Balance" was signed; what is the number now; and how many there should have been under the target in the report, "Achieving a Balance".

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The "Achieving a Balance" agreement was published in 1987 in the report entitled "Hospital Medical Staffing— Achieving a Balance: Plan for Action". It was agreed that consultant expansion of at least 2 per cent. per annum, excluding specified centrally funded posts, should be encouraged. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

The data on consultant expansion—numbers and whole-time equivalent—wte—are shown in the tables. The increase in numbers of 2,580 between 1987 and 1993 includes about 550 centrally funded posts. The average annual increase between 1987 and 1993 is 2.9 per cent., or 2.3 per cent. if centrally funded posts are excluded.

Expansion at 2 per cent. per annum would have implied by 1993, 15,790[1] plus about 550 centrally funded consultants, that is about 16,340, which is some 260 fewer than the actual 1993 figure of 16,600. This comparison cannot be made in wte terms, as the wte of the 550 centrally funded posts is not known.

[1] 14,020 increased by 2 per cent. per annum.

Table 1: Hospital medical consultants (numbers) England as at 30 September

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Numbers	14,020	14,330	14,850	15,520	15,840	16,260	16,600
Percentage change	—	2.2	3.6	4.5	2.0	2.7	2.1

Table 2: Medical consultants whole-time equivalent England–30 September each year

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Whole-time equivalent	12,860	13,200	13,670	14,190	14,500	14,850	15,210
Percentage change	—	2.7	3.5	3.8	2.2	2.4	2.4

Prostatic Cancer

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to bring in a national screening programme for prostatic cancer.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* We have no current plans to introduce a national screening programme for prostate cancer. There is no consensus on the most effective screening method or the best way to treat patients who have a positive test. Until we do, screening may lead to unnecessary treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation, that are more destructive than the disease itself.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stormont (Fire)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many personnel remained overnight within Parliament buildings, Stormont, on the night of 1 and 2 January; what is the estimated cost of the fire damage in the buildings; what emergency arrangements were in place to open the buildings and the entrance gates to Stormont estate; if the House of Commons Chamber will be restored; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The inquiry, which will be conducted by Sir Reginal Doyle, will address the questions of the presence of personnel in Parliament buildings and emergency arrangements.

No estimate had yet been made of the cost of the fire damage.

No decision has yet been taken about the restoration of the former House of Commons Chamber. I will, however, be reviewing options in the light of prevailing circumstances.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give his best estimate of the amount of damage to the old Stormont Commons Chamber and of fire, smoke and water damage elsewhere in the building resulting from the fire at Parliament buildings, Belfast.

Mr. Moss: The damage to Parliament buildings was confined mainly to the former House of Commons Chamber, the internal fixtures of which were largely destroyed. Areas close to the Chamber suffered some heat and smoke damage. Water damage to all areas was minimal.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what artefacts and pictures, other than documents or gifts from other Governments and legislatures were damaged or lost as a consequence of the recent fire at Stormont.

Sir John Wheeler: The pair of Dispatch Boxes believed to have been brought from the House of Lords and which rested on the Clerk's Table were destroyed by the fire.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what documents and records were damaged or lost as a consequence of the recent fire at Stormont which were *(a)* under 50 years old, *(b)* under 75 years old, *(c)* under 100 years old, *(d)* under 150 years old, *(e)* under 175 years old, *(f)* under 200 years old, *(g)* under 250 years old and *(h)* over 250 years old.

Sir John Wheeler: As a consequence of the fire at Parliament buildings on 2 January 1995, two Bibles, oath and prayer cards and the Roll Book were destroyed. All were under 75 years old.

No Public Record Office documents or records were lost. A quantity of unboxed census enumerators' returns on the shelves, unboxed because of their size, were affected by water. However, the thick bindings protected the returns themselves.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what advice was tendered to his Department following the fires at *(a)* Hampton court and *(b)* Windsor castle and the subsequent publication of the report of the inquiry into those fires;

(2) when the fire service report on the cause of the Stormont fire will be published;

(3) if the Stormont buildings had a fire certificate under the Fire Precautions Act 1971 or Northern Ireland equivalent;

(4) what was the cost of additional or alternative fire precautions to the Stormont buildings, following the fires at *(a)* Hampton court and *(b)* Windsor castle and the subsequent publication of the report of the inquiries into those fires;

(5) what advice has been given to those who manage, on behalf of the nation, the Stormont buildings following the result of the investigations into the cause and extent of the fire at the National Trust property, Uppark house, West Sussex in 1989;

(6) what surveys were made to the Stormont buildings, since the fires at *(a)* Hampton court and *(b)* Windsor castle; what additional or alternative fire precautions and installations were recommended which were subsequently installed or implemented; and what was the cost to the Exchequer of those improvements;

(7) what was the assessed fire risk of the Assembly Chamber at Stormont prior to the recent fire; and if he will make a statement;

(8) when was the last occasion that a fire inspection was made of the Stormont Parliament buildings prior to the recent fire; and if he will place a copy of the report of inspection in the Library;

(9) at what time the Assembly Chamber in the Stormont Parliament buildings was locked prior to the discovery of the fire which subsequently destroyed the chamber; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) on 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *235–36*.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what gifts presented by Governments or legislatures were damaged or lost as a consequence of the recent fire at Stormont.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) which security firm is employed to patrol the Stormont Parliament buildings; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if the security firm employed in respect of the Stormont Parliament buildings is required to patrol inside or outside; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: No security firm is employed to patrol the Stormont Parliament buildings. Security of the building is the responsibility of staff employed by the Department of Finance and Personnel, who patrol inside the building. Vehicle access is controlled by DFP security guards whilst patrols within the Stormont estate are undertaken by the RUC.

Fire Legislation

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has appointed a person responsible for arrangements relating to fire matters as referred to in section 27(5) of the Fire Services Northern Ireland Order 1984.

Mr. Moss: Article 27(5) of the Fire Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 does not provide for the appointment of any person.

Hotel Grants

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the hotels that have received Northern Ireland tourist board, European Union or International Fund for Ireland capital development grants in 1994, 1993 and 1992, with the amount of grant awarded in each case, and the rate of grant expressed as a percentage of the total eligible cost of the development.

Mr. Ancram: The hotels which accepted offers of selective assistance from the Northern Ireland tourist board under its tourism development scheme in each year were:

Hotel	*Selective assistance offered (£)*	*Percentage of estimate eligible project cost*
1994		
Causeway Hotel	100,000	20
Waterfoot Hotel	80,000	10
Calgorm Manor	355,000	30
Roe Park Hotel	2,150,000	47
Killyhevlin Hotel	200,000	19
1993		
Manor House Hotel	430,000	23
Clandeboye Lodge Hotel	450,000	31
Marine Court Hotel	450,000	16
1992		
Glenavon House Hotel	450,000	25
Brown Trout Inn	80,000	21
Feneghy House Hotel	177,000	34
Bushtown House Hotel	26,000	5

The following hotels accepted offers of assistance under European Union tourism programmes toward the cost of specific visitor facilities such as conference centres, activity and leisure facilities. In each case, the offer of grant represented 40 per cent. of the estimated eligible costs.

Hotel	*Assistance offered (£)*
1994	
Marine Court Hotel	500,000
Waterfoot Hotel	166,000
Roe Park Hotel, Golf and Country Club	950,000
1993	
Glenavon House Hotel	300,000
Manor House Hotel	200,000
1992	
Beech Hill Country House Hotel	26,000
Bushtown House Hotel	61,670
Fenaghy House Hotel	29,590

Grants to hotels from the International Fund for Ireland, is a matter for the independent board of the fund, under its chairman, Mr. W. T McCarter.

Cardiac Surgeons, Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cardiac surgeons are employed at the Royal Victoria hospital; what proposals there are to employ additional cardiac surgeons at this hospital; and if he will make a statement about the waiting list for cardiac operations at the Royal Victoria hospital.

Mr. Moss: There are five cardiac surgeons employed at present at the Royal Victoria hospital Belfast. I am not aware of any proposals by the Royal Group of Hospitals HSS trust, which employs the surgeons, to increase this number. Prior to 1992, there were three cardiac surgeons at the RVH, but since the appointment of two others, in May 1992 and September 1993 respectively, there have been very significant reductions both in numbers waiting for surgery and in waiting times. Between September 1991 and September 1994, the total number waiting was reduced from almost 1,000 to 449, while between September 1993 and November 1994 the number waiting in excess of 18 months fell from 258 to 11. Further reductions in numbers and times can be expected.

Strangford Lough Ferry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of crewing at the Strangford Lough ferry; what proposals there are to change the level of crewing; and if he will make a statement about the adequacy of crewing and safety at sea at this ferry service.

Mr. Moss: Each of the two ferries operating between Strangford and Portaferry has a crew of four. A review of all aspects of the ferry, including the level of crewing, is presently under way. The level of crewing and safety on the ferries meets the requirements of the Marine Safety Agency.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Sir John Wheeler: These matters are set out in the framework document for each Northern Ireland agency, which is available in the House of Commons Library. Northern Ireland agencies are included in the Next Steps Review 1994 (Cm 2750).

Drug Seizures

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many drug seizures there were, and what quantities of drugs were seized, in each of the last four years.

Sir John Wheeler: The quantities of drugs seized were as follows:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Cannabis Kilos	37.6	39.0	15.75	44.5
Cannabis plants	5	19	—	419

	1990	1991	1992	1993
Cocaine	—	88 gms	77 gms	19 gms
Opiates (inc. Heroin)	2,757 MST tabs	250 doses Dipipanone 1 gm Morphine	20 gms 57 doses	363 gms
LSD	573 doses	800 doses	9,201 doses	8,022 doses
MDMA (Ecstasy)	—	2,711	4,408	2,923 tabs
Amphetamines	95.2 gms	625 gms 25 tabs	5,732 gms	1,728 doses

Information on the number of drugs seizures is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Figures for 1994 are not yet available.

Abattoirs

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was *(a)* the total capacity and *(b)* the total number of abattoirs in Northern Ireland in 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994; and how many abattoirs in Northern Ireland now conform to the requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows. The Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992 do not extend to Northern Ireland. However, all abattoirs conform to the requirements of the EC fresh meat directive.

Year	Annual Slaughter Capacity (DANI estimate) Cattle	Sheep	Pigs	Number of Slaughter Plants Cattle/Sheep	Pigs
1979	650,000	n/a	1,500,000	13	7
1984	750,000	n/a	1,500,000	18	7
1989	800,000	1,250,000	1,800,000	16	7
1994	800,000	950,000	1,500,000	10	5

n/a - not available.

Right of Silence

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to publish promptly research carried out by his Department into the changes in the right of silence introduced in Northern Ireland in 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: When significant research is conducted within the Northern Ireland Office on criminal justice matters, it is normally made public at an early stage. When we commission work from external researchers, we are ready to consider sympathetically any proposal by the authors to publish their work.

In my reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) of 18 April 1994, *Official Report*, columns *393–94*, I said that I was placing in the Library a summary of the findings of an analysis by the Northern Ireland Office of aspects of the operation and effect of the provisions of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. The further research into the operation and effects of the 1988 order mentioned in my reply is being conducted externally and has been delayed: when we receive it, we shall consider its publication in the light of the general policy set out above.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Firearms Form 110

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when firearms form 110 relating to the temporary import of shotguns will be reprinted by Her Majesty's Stationery Office; and when the forms will be distributed to police forces.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: A new supply of these security-printed forms will be available to police forces on Tuesday, 17 January.

Natural Environment Research Council

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the response from the chief executive of the Natural Environment Research Council in relation to science-based archaeology.

Mr. David Hunt: The policy framework governing the research councils' missions was set out in the White Paper "Realising Our Potential". It is for the research councils to determine priorities between grant proposals and to decide how to assess competing proposals. In proposing changes affecting science-based archaeology, the chief executive of NERC has said that the council wishes to support excellent science in this area consistent with the council's mission. I hope that those who are concerned about his specific proposals will take the opportunity offered to discuss the way forward with him.

Research Councils

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his letter of 14 October 1994 to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what progress the Director General of Research Councils has made in his examination of the balance of effort expended by the research councils between the initial selection of projects to be funded, monitoring of projects once funded and their evaluation at the end.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Good progress is being made. The Economic and Social Research Council already evaluates the outcome of all its research awards. All major Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council projects are appraised prior to commitment and monitored throughout implementation; post-project evaluation will be carried out. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council have reviews in progress. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council decided in December to switch

the balance of effort over three years towards monitoring and evaluation.

Research and Development

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of research and development expenditure was funded by *(a)* Government Departments, *(b)* business enterprises, *(c)* higher education and *(d)* non-profit making charities for each year since 1985.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information requested is shown in the following table.

The funding of total United Kingdom research and development: 1985 to 1992
(Percentage terms, rounded to nearest whole number)

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Government Departments	43	40	39	36	36	35	35	35
Business Enterprise	47	48	49	52	51	50	49	50
Higher Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Non Profit Charities	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3
Abroad	8	9	9	9	10	12	12	11
TOTAL £ Million	8,093	8,768	9,383	10,227	11,288	12,019	12,161	12,619

Source:
Statistical Supplement to the Forward Look of Government-funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1994 (table 1.5.3).

EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament for the Employment Service. The chief executive of the ES has full authority to manage the agency and its day-to-day work. He is accountable to the Secretary of State for managing the agency efficiently and effectively, and for its operations and its performance against agreed targets within the resources allocated, in accordance with the agency's objectives and published standards of service. Full details of the division of responsibilities are set out in the ES framework document, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Northern Region

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his strategy for economic development in the northern region.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government's strategy for economic development in the northern region is the same as for the United Kingdom as a whole—to promote sustained economic growth and rising prosperity, through a stable macro-economic environment and structural policies to improve long-term economic performance. The policies of the Department are aimed at achieving this objective, particularly by helping disadvantaged groups within the labour market.

Career Development Loans

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of career development loans made in 1993–94, broken down by standard region; and what was the average value of each loan.

Mr. Paice: During 1993–94, 12,159 career development loans were approved. The following table lists a regional breakdown of these together with average loan values:

Region	*Number of loans*	*Average loan value (£)*
Greater London	3,177	3,113
South East	1,658	2,774
Scotland	1,099	2,535
Eastern	1,046	2,899
South West	1,029	2,782
Yorks and Humberside	870	2,667
East Midlands	764	2,684
West Midlands	750	2,923
North West	618	3,021
Wales	493	2,888
Northern	396	2,684
Greater Manchester	259	2,978
Great Britain	12,159	2,867

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made on the arrangements to ensure continuity of training and business support programmes following the appointment of an administrative receiver to manage the affairs of the South Thames training and enterprise council.

Mr. Paice: As foreshadowed in the minute laid before the House on 21 December 1994 by the Employment Department and the Department of the Environment, letters of comfort have been issued to certain providers of training and business support programmes within the area covered by South Thames training and enterprise council. That process is continuing. The minute said that some of the indemnities were likely to be called in and that has now occurred. Accordingly, the first payments will be made shortly from class V Employment Department vote 1 and from class VII Department of the Environment vote 3. It continues to be the Government's objective, in conjunction with the receiver, to help maintain so far as possible training and business support for those on Government-funded programmes previously run by South Thames TEC.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Policing, Plymouth

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contribution Associated British Ports is making toward policing in Plymouth.

Mr. Maclean: The officers deployed to Millbay dock are there to maintain public order and ensure that the public highway is kept clear. The chief constable has told me that there is therefore no question of charging any private concern for this deployment.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaints his Department has received from residents of Plymouth about the level of policing in residential areas since October 1994.

Mr. Maclean: None. It is for the chief constable to decide on the deployment of resources in Plymouth and in other districts of the Devon and Cornwall constabulary.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the full cost of policing the export of live animals from Millbay docks in Plymouth will be met by Devon and Cornwall police;

(2) what has been the total cost to Devon and Cornwall police of providing escorts and protection for those transporting live animals for export from Millbay docks in Plymouth in the last 12 months.

Mr. Maclean: Police officers have been deployed at Millbay docks to maintain public order and ensure that the public highway is kept clear.

No estimate of the total cost of the operation has been made but, as at 13 January, the additional costs to the police were estimated at some £20,000.

Under the current funding arrangements, the Home Office pays 51 per cent. of all the force's expenditure on policing. In addition, support provided by the Department of the Environment brings the level of central Government support for policing to some 90 per cent.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *151*, if police officers are now being used to escort loads of live animals for export to Millbay docks in Plymouth.

Mr. Maclean: Police officers continue to be deployed at Millbay docks whenever necessary to maintain public order and ensure that the public highway is kept clear.

Police Authority Allowances

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the attendance allowance, *(b)* the car mileage allowance and *(c)* the subsistence allowance for current members of each local police authority.

Mr. Maclean: Existing police authorities are part of the local government structure. Attendance allowances for councillors are a matter for the authorities concerned and information about payments in respect of police authorities is not held centrally.

The car mileage allowance is at present:

Capacity	*Rate (pence per mile)*
Not exceeding 999cc	22.0
1000 to 1199cc	23.9
Over 1199cc	26.6

The subsistence allowance is at present:

	(£)
Overnight absence—London	78.50
Overnight absence—Elsewhere	68.80
Day subsistence—over 12 hours	10.00
Day subsistence—over 8 hours	8.60
Day subsistence—over 4 hours	4.00

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate for the total cost in England and Wales for 1994–95 of *(a)* attendance allowance, *(b)* car mileage allowances and *(c)* subsistence allowance for the current local police authorities.

Mr. Maclean: Existing police authorities are part of the local government structure. Information is not collected centrally about planned expenditure by individual police authorities on these items.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the attendance allowance, *(b)* the car mileage allowance and *(c)* the subsistence allowance for members of the new police authorities.

Mr. Maclean: There is no attendance allowance as such for members of new police authorities. Councillor and independent members may claim £15 per hour while working on police authority business, up to a limit of £120 per day and £3,000 per year. Magistrate members may claim a financial loss allowances of up to:

£24.72–£32.96 for the self-employed—for up to four hours

£49.95–£65.92 for the self-employed—for over four hours and up to 24 hours.

The car mileage allowance for all members is at present:

Capacity	*Rate (pence per mile)*
Up to 1100 cc	22.8
1101 to 1400 cc	29.0
over 1401 cc	26.6

These rates apply to the first 5,000 miles claimed by a member in the financial year. Thereafter a standard rate of 12.1 pence per mile will be paid.

The subsistence allowance for all members is at present:

	(£)
Overnight absence—London	81.60
Overnight absence—Elsewhere	71.50
Day subsistence—over 12 hours	10.70
Day subsistence—over 8 hours	9.15
Day subsistence—over 4 hours	5.35

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate for the total cost in England and Wales in 1995–96 of *(a)* attendance

allowance, *(b)* car mileage allowance and *(c)* subsistence allowance for the new police authorities.

Mr. Maclean: The allowances paid to councillor and independent members of new police authorities depend on the amount of work they undertake on behalf of the authority. If all members undertake sufficient work to claim the maximum amount of allowances available, the total expenditure would be £1,863,000 in a financial year.

Magistrate members of new police authorities may claim a financial loss allowance, and the total expenditure will depend on the amount of their loss.

The expenditure on car mileage and subsistence allowance will depend on the way individual authorities conduct their business. Information is not available centrally about their plans for expenditure on these items.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the prisoners serving mandatory and discretionary life sentences respectively, who have been informed that their tariff is their natural life, and the date on which he made that decision in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: To date, 15 mandatory life sentence prisoners have been informed, in accordance with the judgement in the case of Doody et al, that previous Ministers set a whole life tariff in their case. These prisoners now have the right to make representations in the light of the disclosure given them. If they do so, their case will be considered afresh. No decision has been made in any of these cases, nor has a whole life tariff been set in any other case.

Parole

Mr. Marland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether non admission of guilt by a convicted criminal affects his application for parole;

(2) what were the implications of Roger Payne's refusal to admit to being guilty of murder for his application for parole;

(3) how many applications for parole have been made by Roger Payne; and why they were refused.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is no statutory basis, rule or policy which automatically prevents any prisoner who denies guilt from being released from custody on licence. Mandatory life sentence prisoners who deny their guilt, can be and have been released on life licence—not parole—if the Parole Board, which advises on risk, so recommends and the Secretary of State accepts the recommendation.

Mr. Payne's case has been reviewed by the Parole Board on seven occasions since his conviction for murder in 1968. Following the Parole Board's last review in 1990, the risk to the public in releasing Mr. Payne was still considered to be unacceptable.

Psychiatrists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met and when he next proposes to meet representatives from the Royal College of Psychiatrists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Home Office enjoys regular contact with the college and is represented as an observer at meetings of the college's forensic section. I plan to meet representatives of the college in the near future.

Constitutional Issues

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what staff, and at what grades *(a)* from A division and *(b)* from any division, deal with constitutional issues; and what is their work programme for the year.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Within A division of the Home Office, some of the duties of a total of 10 staff variously at grade 5, grade 7, higher executive officer, executive officer and administrative officer concern constitutional issues, excluding staff and duties concerned with the constitutional relationship with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Their work programme is to provide advice and support on the exercise of certain prerogative powers and other royal matters, on Church matters, on overall policy concerning human rights, including the United Kingdom's obligations under international human rights instruments and other related matters. In D division of the Home Office, staff effort equivalent to five full-time staff variously at grade 5, grade 7, HEO and EO is devoted to electoral matters. Their work programme is to continue to support my right hon. and learned Friend in the exercise of his statutory functions in relation to electoral matters. In this work, these staff have as necessary the assistance of numerous colleagues in the Home Office.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what dates since 20 June 1994 he has received reports on the management of Doncaster prison by Premier Prison Services;

(2) how many of those prisoners requiring immediate transfer from Doncaster prison in the period 20 June to 1 November 1994, *(a)* had self-inflicted injuries and *(b)* had injuries received as a result of assault from other prisoners;

(3) on what dates inquests were held into those prisoners who died when held in Doncaster prison; with what result; and when he expects the inquest into Lee Bowen's death to take place;

(4) how many prisoners at Doncaster prison were, as of 1 November, on rule 43;

(5) how many and what percentage of the prisoners at Doncaster prison on 1 November *(a)* had served a previous sentence in prison before their present sentence, *(b)* were on remand, *(c)* were living in south Yorkshire at the time of their arrest and *(d)* were living in west Yorkshire at the time of their arrest.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 16 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Doncaster prison.

Reports on Doncaster are submitted each month by the on-site Controller, who is a senior governor grade, to the area manager. He,

in turn, discusses these reports with the Operational Director at their monthly meetings.

Of those prisoners transferred to outside hospital between 20 June and 1 November, all returned to prison the same day. Seven were transferred as a result of self-inflicted injuries and four as a result of assaults by other prisoners. Five prisoners attended hospital in October and eight in November.

The inquest into the death of Ian Buck took place on 1 December, when the jury returned a verdict of suicide. The inquest into the death of Shaun Webster is expected to be heard this month. It is not yet known when the inquest into the death of Lee Bowen, who died in outside hospital, will be heard.

On 1 November there were three prisoners segregated under rule 43 for reasons of general order and discipline. None was segregated under rule 43 for protection from other inmates.

On November 728 prisoners, or 98 per cent. of the population, had served a previous sentence before their present one. 367, or 50 per cent. of prisoners, were on remand. 346, or 46 per cent. of prisoners, were living in South Yorkshire at the time of their arrest; and 164, or 22 per cent. of prisoners were living in West Yorkshire at the time of their arrest.

Prison Ombudsman

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisons the prisons ombudsman has visited since his appointment.

(2) what is the present address of the office of the prisons ombudsman; and what has been the total cost spent on furnishings and fittings at his office since his appointment;

(3) how many meetings the prisons ombudsman has had with *(a)* prison governors, *(b)* the board of prison visitors and *(c)* prison officers or members of the executive committee of the Prison Officers Association;

(4) what are the terms of reference of the appointment of the prisons ombudsman; and to whom he is directly repsonsible;

(5) how many complaints have been received from prison inmates by the prisons ombudsman since his appointment;

(6) what is his assessment of the role of the prisons ombudsman and members of boards of visitors at prisons in England and Wales; and if he will encourage a continuing relationship in their general discussion on matters relating to the Prison Service in England and Wales.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The prison ombudsman was appointed to consider grievances submitted by individual prisoners who have failed to obtain satisfaction from the Prison Service's internal complaints system and, where necessary, to make recommendations to the Director General of the Prison Service or to the Home Secretary. A full job description is available in the Library. The post is independent of the Prison Service and the prison ombudsman is directly responsible to the Home Secretary.

By 11 January 1995, the prisons ombudsman had received 398 complaints since his office became operational on 24 October 1994. Boards of visitors have the role given to them by the Prison Rules 1964 as amended. Broadly, the task of boards is to look into the condition of prison premises, the administration of establishments and the treatment of prisoners. Boards report to the Secretary of State annually and must inform him immediately of any abuse which comes to their knowledge. They must visit establishments frequently, and have access to every part of a prison, to its records and to all prisoners. The prisons ombudsman can request reports from boards if he wishes, and may refer to them complaints suitable for local resolution with their help. Boards of visitors are left free to judge when their intervention in the grievance procedure is most effective.

The address of the prison ombudsman is St Vincent House, 30 Orange Street, London WC2 7HH. The cost of furnishings and fittings has been £17,417.

Since his appointment, the prisons ombudsman has visited 37 prisons. At each, he has met the governor and other governor grades, prison officers and representatives of the boards of visitors. He has also attended and addressed meetings of governors and their area managers and the boards of visitors' national conference. He was represented at the conference of the Association of Members of Boards of Visitors. He is planning to attend a board of visitors' training course. He has also met the chairman and general secretary of the Prison Officers Association.

The appointment of the ombudsman is not intended to replace the vital role of boards of visitors in any way. The functions of boards are set out in section 6(2) of the Prisons Act 1952, Prison Rules 1964 as amended and Youth Offender Institutions Rules 1988 as amended. Boards play a key role in the local monitoring of prisons in England and Wales and there are no plans to abolish or undermine their role. However, the prisons ombudsman may need to be in contact with boards as part of his investigation of specific complaints submitted to him by prisoners.

I have set up a review of the role of boards of visitors in order to look at the framework in which they operate and the relationship between them and the prisons ombudsman and HM inspectorate of prisons. I will most certainly want to encourage discussion of those matters in the context of my forthcoming review. The aim of my review is to enhance the vital work carried out by members of boards of visitors.

Police Equipment

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by police authority what new personal equipment is being considered for the protection of police officers and the apprehension of suspects.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* Details of equipment which is under consideration by individual forces are not available centrally. We understand however, that police forces in England and Wales have obtained, or have announced decisions to obtain, certain new items of protective equipment as follows. Forces which have adopted the side-handled baton for general duties are Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cleveland, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Greater Manchester, Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Norfolk, North Wales, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, Sussex, Thames Valley, West Mercia and West Yorkshire.

The following forces have adopted a three-piece telescopic friction-lock baton for general duties: Avon and Somerset, Bedfordshire, Devon and Cornwall, Durham, Dyfed-Powys, Gloucestershire, Gwent, Hampshire, Kent and Surrey. Dorset, the Metropolitan police and Staffordshire have adopted rigid straight batons for general duties. All forces have introduced the rigid hand-cuff, except Northamptonshire and Sussex.

At a national level, possible use of aerosol incapacitants for police self-defence is under consideration by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many attempted suicide cases took place in Her Majesty's prisons in the north west over the last two years; and how many attempts were successful.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Robert Parry, dated 16 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of attempted and actual suicide cases in prisons in the north west.

During the two years to 31 December 1994, in prison in the north west there were 210 recorded cases where prisoners had harmed themselves. Some of these may have been attempts at suicide but self harm does not always indicate a suicide attempt. Sadly 12 cases of self harm resulted in the deaths of the prisoners.

Suicide prevention is taken very seriously by the Service. A new training package "Caring for the Suicidal in Custody" was introduced for all staff in 1994. This provides support to those staff involved in identifying and caring for prisoners who are at risk of suicide. In many establishments the Samaritans and a group of volunteer specially-trained prisoners work closely alongside staff in the care of prisoners at risk. We shall continue to do all we can to reduce deaths by suicide in custody.

Prisoners

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A and category B risk prisoners have been reclassified as category C risk for each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 16 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of category A and B prisoners who have been re-classified as category C for each year since 1979.

It is not possible for a category A prisoner to be directly regraded to category C. Re-categorisations from B to C are the responsibility for local establishments and no central records are kept. I regret that the information requested is not available.

EDUCATION

Staff Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will list the number of temporary teachers paid on a daily rate who were employed by each college in England for longer than 26 weeks during each year since 1991; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will list, by college, the number of redundancies, both voluntary and compulsory, that have taken place in England in each academic year since 1990–91; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list, by grade, the numbers of full-time academic staff funded by the further education budget for each further education college in England on 1 October in each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The information is in a table which will be placed in the Library. Figures for 1990–91 cannot be produced without incurring disproportionate costs.

Computer Networks

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much her Department spent in each of the last three years for which figures are available to assist universities in connecting to the joint academic network and the Internet.

Mr. Boswell: The Department does not fund higher education networking directly. Responsibility for overseeing the joint academic network—JANET—among higher eduction institutions in Britain lies with the joint information systems committee of the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and for Wales and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. In 1993–94, the committee spent some £5.75 million on operating JANET and £8 million on Super-JANET: both allow access to the Internet. Comparable spending by its predecessor, the information systems committee of the Universities Funding Council, amounted in 1991–92 to some £4.3 million on JANET; and in 1992–93 to some £5.5 million on JANET and £5.4 million on Super-JANET.

"Drug Prevention in Schools"

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many regional conferences on her Department's draft circular, "Drug Prevention in Schools", have taken place; and what submissions have arisen from them.

Mr. Forth: The DFE is sponsoring a series of regional conferences to raise awareness of drugs issues and to stimulate debate at local level. I addressed the first of these in York on the 12 January, and further conferences are planned in Birmingham and Bristol. The initial response has been very positive, and will inform our programme of other initiatives on drug prevention and schools, including the preparation of final guidance to schools.

Further Education Funding

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the average unit of resource funding per further education student in England for each year since 1991; what was the average unit of resource funding for each trainee in a training centre for the same period; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The average funding per full-time equivalent student in the further education sector in 1992–93 was £2,506, and £2,582 in 1993–94. The funding of trainees in training centres is a matter for the Secretary of State for Employment.

Trainee Teacher Bursary Scheme

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received regarding the non-availability of bursaries for trainee teachers in designated subjects under the trainee teacher bursary scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: All students who meet the requirements of the scheme are awarded bursaries. From time to time, representations have been made arguing for or against changes in those requirements, primarily from institutions concerned about course eligibility.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total value of bursaries awarded under the trainee teacher bursary scheme in 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: In the financial year 1993–94, the total value of bursaries paid out was £8,722,000.

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many bursaries have been awarded to initial teacher trainees under the trainee teacher bursary scheme in the current academic year;

(2) how many applications were made to trainee teacher bursaries by students for the academic year 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: Formal applications from higher education institutions on behalf of a total of over 7,300 students who started their courses in autumn 1994 have recently been received in the Department. We expect that all, or virtually all, of the applications will meet the conditions of the scheme, and will therefore attract payment at the scheduled times. About 1,300 second-year students will also be eligible.

Mature Students Allowance

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many students received the mature students' allowance in each of the last five years for which figures are available at universities *(a)* throughout the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Scotland; and what percentage of all mature students in each category these figures represent;

(2) what was the total cost of operating the mature students' allowance in each of the last five years for which information is available *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Scotland.

Mr. Boswell: The numbers and gross value of older students' allowances made by local education authorities in England and Wales as part of mandatory awards made to students domiciled in their areas in the academic years 1988–89 to 1992–93—the latest year for which figures are available—are shown in the table. The total number of older students in higher education domiciled in England and Wales is not readily available.

Mandatory awards are made in respect of attendance on designated courses throughout the United Kingdom. The older students' allowance forms part of the mandatory award for eligible students but, because the award is means-tested, it is not possible to identify the value of the net allowance within the payable award.

The administrative costs of operating the older students' allowance are not collected centrally.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland are responsible for student support in those countries.

Number[1] and value of older students' allowances England and Wales: 1988–89 to 1992–93

Academic year	*Number*	*Gross value £ million*
1988–89	12,700	8.3
1989–90	14,250	9.9
1990–91	17,000	12.2
1991–92	23,000	17.6
1992–93	32,500	26.2

[1] The table shows the number of students in receipt of mandatory awards who qualify for the older students' allowance and the gross value of the allowances made.

Student Maintenance

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what recent provisions her Department has made to alleviate student hardship;

(2) if she will make a statement on the cut in student maintenance in the November budget; and what assessment she has made of possible adverse effects on the student population.

Mr. Boswell: The statement made by my right hon. Friend on 29 November last year said that, for those eligible for mandatory awards and student loans, the total support available through the main rates of grant and loan would increase by 2.5 per cent. for the 1995–96 academic year. The total support available through grant and loan has risen slightly in real terms since 1990 when loans were first introduced. The access funds can provide additional assistance to full-time students in particular need. The increase in student numbers over recent years does not suggest that students are being deterred from entering higher education on financial grounds.

Student Loans Co.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will make a statement on the Student Loans Co.;

(2) what recent representations she has made to the Student Loans Co. for the improvement of waiting times for student appointments and communication within the service; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend annually sets performance targets for the Student Loans Co., including the payment of loans to students. The company has apologised for its recent failure to maintain its usual high standards. It is conducting a thorough review into recent delays in the payment of loans following the introduction of a simplified repeat application procedure, and the steps necessary to prevent a recurrence. As part of that review, the company will consult widely and the results will be reported to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many students in the United Kingdom have applied for loans during the last 12 months; and what was the figure in 1992;

(2) how many people are currently employed by the Student Loans Co.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her estimate of the number of students in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England who are awaiting money due from the Student Loans Co. for the start of the current academic year.

Mr. Boswell: These are matters for the Students Loans Co. I have asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has had concerning late payments to students by the Student Loans Co.; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received about 40 representations on delays in the processing of loans. The Department has also received a number of telephone calls from both students and higher education institutions.

Residential Care Pupils

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils in residential care are placed in schools outside their local authority area *(a)* in Kirklees, *(b)* in all Yorkshire council areas and *(c)* nationally.

Mr. Forth: The information is not available centrally.

Disabled Students' Awards

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *160* on disabled students' awards, if she will break down the figures by region or local authority.

Mr. Boswell: The number and gross value of disabled students' allowances made by local education authorities in England and Wales as part of mandatory awards in the academic years 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 are shown by region in the table.

Disabled Students Allowances[1]: 1990–91 to 1992–93
England and Wales

	Awards			Expenditure £ thousands		
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*
North	30	80	110	51	115	164
Yorkshire and Humberside	50	180	350	70	231	326
North West	150	210	380	166	271	527
East Midlands	40	150	240	29	236	459
West Midlands	70	110	190	109	194	316
East Anglia	20	50	90	19	61	134
South East	200	450	690	277	597	1,136
South West	40	130	230	82	140	398
Total England[2]	600	1,340	2,290	803	1,846	3,460
Wales	40	90	200	66	114	286
Total England and Wales[2]	640	1,430	2,490	869	1,959	3,745

Source:
F503G.
Notes:
[1] The table shows the number of allowances, not the number of students. Students can receive more than one type of disabled students' allowance.
[2] Constituent parts may not add through due to roundings.

SCOTLAND

Sheriff Courts

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many ordinary actions were raised in *(a)* Glasgow, *(b)* Edinburgh, *(c)* Aberdeen, *(d)* Paisley, *(e)* Dundee, *(f)* Airdrie and *(g)* Stornoway sheriff courts in November 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figures for ordinary actions are set out in the following table:

November 1994

	Ordinary actions
(a) Glasgow	743
(b) Edinburgh	469
(c) Aberdeen	282
(d) Paisley	212
(e) Dundee	163
(f) Airdrie	141
(g) Stornoway	11

Student Funding

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average amount of funding for each student in higher education in Scotland in each year since 1987–88.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Complete information is not readily available in the form requested.

The average amount per student of recurrent grant funding plus estimated publicly-funded tuition fees at the higher education institutions funded, since April 1993, by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council is as follows:

Academic year	*Amount per student £*
1993–94	5,100
1994–95	5,200

Council of Europe

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he proposes to take in response to recommendation 1245 (1994) of the parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe relating to detention pending trial; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Recommendation 1245 (1994) of the parliamentary Assembly of the

Council of Europe has yet to be approved by the Committee of Ministers. The existing requirements in Scots law in relation to the detention of persons pending trial are designed to balance the interests of the accused and the presumption of innocence with the interests of justice and public safety.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the pupil-teacher ratio for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary education authority schools; and what plans he has for improving such ratios.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The 1993–94 pupil-teacher ratios for primary and secondary education authority schools are 19.5 and 12.8 respectively. Staffing levels in schools, which clearly govern such ratios, are a matter for local authorities to determine.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the pupil-teacher ratio in independent and grant-aided schools for *(a)* under 11 years and *(b)* over 12 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information by age ranges in the form requested is not available. The overall pupil-teacher ratio in the independent and grant-aided—including grant-aided special—school sectors is 10.6:1 and 8.5:1 respectively.

NHS Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospital NHS beds in each year since 1978, and for each area of Scotland, were available in total and by specialty for *(a)* acute, *(b)* intensive care, *(c)* long-term care (geriatric), *(d)* maternity *(e)* paediatric, *(f)* psychiatric and *(g)* casualty.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* I am arranging for the information on hospital NHS beds for the years since 1986 together with total numbers of hospital NHS beds for the years between 1978 and 1985 to be sent to the right hon. Member and placed in the Library of the House. Bed numbers for individual specialties are not readily available for the period between 1978 and 1985.

Mr. Monser-al-Kassar

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration led to the release from prison of Mr. Monser-al-Kassar.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On 25 December 1977 Monser-al-Kassar completed a prison sentence which had been imposed on him. Thereafter he was detained as an illegal entrant and was removed as such to the Lebanon on 16 February 1978.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his letter of 31 August 1994 to Councillor Robert Gould of Strathclyde regional council, what are his latest estimates of the savings over 15 years of the revised structure of local government in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The estimated savings over 15 years due to local government re-organisation in Scotland remain those set out in my letter of 31 August to Mr. Gould, a copy of which I am depositing in the House Library.

Bellwin Scheme

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if capital expenditure by local authorities, including the capital repair of housing stock, is recoverable under the Bellwin scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Bellwin scheme applies only to expenditure of a current nature.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the cost of furniture storage by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* individual tenants and *(c)* individual owner-occupiers will be rechargeable at 85 per cent. of gross costs under the Bellwin scheme.

Mr. Stewart: The cost to local authorities of storing furniture is in principle eligible for grant under the Bellwin scheme, provided that the other criteria of the scheme are met.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the elements of flood prevention measures which are reclaimable under the Bellwin scheme.

Mr. Stewart: The cost of emergency repairs to flood prevention work can be eligible for grant under the Bellwin scheme. The construction of new works, or the carrying out of longer-term works of reinstatement which would be of a capital rather than a current nature, are not eligible for such grant.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how affected regional and district authorities can maximise their claims in relation to the Bellwin scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The regional and district councils affected by the recent floods can maximise the assistance they obtain under the Bellwin scheme by ensuring that they include in their claims all items of expenditure eligible under the scheme. The Scottish Office finance circular number 6/1990, a copy of which is in the Library, gives guidance on what could be eligible under the scheme, and what is excluded. Officials of the Scottish Office have had discussions with some of the relevant councils to explain the arrangements and will give advice as necessary.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the trigger figure for the Bellwin scheme for each *(a)* district, *(b)* regional and *(c)* proposed unitary authority in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The present thresholds for all existing local authorities in Scotland are in the table. Thresholds for the new unitary authorities are not yet available.

Authority	*1994–95 threshold* £
Regions:	
Borders	164,304
Central	423,730
Dumfries and Galloway	234,432
Fife	541,408
Grampian	783,305
Highland	312,175
Lothian	1,183,230
Strathclyde	3,591,706
Tayside	601,048

Authority	*1994–95 threshold £*
Districts:	
Aberdeen	49,357
Angus	21,821
Annandale and Eskdale	8,847
Argyll and Bute	15,170
Badenoch and Strathspey	2,640
Banff and Buchan	19,538
Bearsden and Milngavie	9,224
Berwickshire	4,537
Caithness	6,049
Clackmannan	11,268
Clydebank	10,764
Clydesdale	13,374
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	14,216
Cumnock and Doon Valley	10,371
Cunninghame	32,182
Dumbarton	17,976
Dundee	38,859
Dunfermline	29,942
East Kilbride	19,490
East Lothian	20,023
Eastwood	13,685
Edinburgh	104,963
Ettrick and Lauderdale	7,980
Falkirk	33,635
Glasgow	164,869
Gordon	16,932
Hamilton	24,654
Inverclyde	20,977
Inverness	14,342
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	19,221
Kincardine and Deeside	11,688
Kirkcaldy	34,978
Kyle and Carrick	27,047
Lochaber	4,404
Midlothian	18,387
Monklands	23,981
Moray	19,530
Motherwell	33,369
Nairn	2,433
Nithsdale	13,391
North East Fife	15,979
Perth and Kinross	29,132
Renfrew	46,490
Ross and Cromarty	10,928
Roxburgh	8,446
Skye and Lochalsh	2,678
Stewartry	6,658
Stirling	18,523
Strathkelvin	19,641
Sutherland	3,173
Tweeddale	3,587
West Lothian	33,431
Wigtown	7,134
Islands:	
Orkney	35,274
Shetland	39,053
Western Isles	52,413

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the dates on which the Bellwin scheme has been invoked in Scotland since 1980; if he will give the locations and reasons in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Bellwin scheme was introduced in 1983. Since then, it has been triggered six times as follows:

28 April 1989
All Scotland.
8 February 1990
All Scotland.
8 January 1991
West of Scotland of which: Strathclyde Region, Highland Region, Dumfries and Galloway Region, Districts within those Regions, Western Isles Islands Council.
10 January 1992
Shetland Isles Islands Council, Orkney, Isles Islands Council, Western Isles Islands Council, Highland Region, Central Region. Districts within those Regions.
18 January 1993
Tayside Region. Districts within that Region.
19 December 1994
Strathclyde Region. Districts within that Region.

In 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992 it was activated following a combination of flood and storm damage. In 1993 it was activated principally for the exceptional flooding in Tayside region, but this had been preceded by severe winds and blizzards.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the main components of expenditure which are reclaimable under the Bellwin scheme and those which are not; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Scottish Office finance circular No. 6/1990 sets out the rules governing the operation of the Bellwin scheme in Scotland.

Eligible expenditure under the scheme must be incurred by a local authority in providing relief and carrying out immediate works to safeguard life or property or prevent suffering or severe inconvenience to affected communities.

The main categories of expenditure that could in principle be eligible under the Bellwin scheme are:

the cost of additional temporary employees or of contractors called in to work directly on the emergency or to replace permanent employees diverted from their usual work;

special overtime paid to permanent employees in the emergency or, later, to catch up on work from which they have diverted;

the cost of hiring additional plant and machinery;

emergency works required to safeguard dangerous structures, including temporary repairs to highways, pavements, footpaths;

the cost of evacuating people from dangerous structures and temporarily housing them (including associated social services support);

the costs of supplying food, other stores and key services to affected communities;

the costs of maintaining key communications, in particular clearing of roads.

Expenditure excluded from the scheme includes:

the normal wages and salaries of the authority's regular employees or the standing costs of plant and equipment;

the cost of dealing with any damage or loss that is insurable under normal insurance policies;

longer-term works of repair and restoration, and repair and refurbishment of damaged but not dangerous structures;

payment to householders and others in respect of damage to non-insurable items such as garden fences and trees and shrubs, unless action must be taken immediately because they present a danger to the community.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Bellwin scheme was *(a)* initiated and *(b)* last reviewed or revised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Bellwin scheme has been in force since 1983 and specific statutory powers were provided in section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The scheme was last revised in March 1990 following the decision to increase the grant rate from 75 per cent. to 85 per cent.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Bellwin scheme as it applies to the victims of the Strathclyde floods in December 1994.

Mr. Stewart: The Bellwin scheme, through the assistance it gives to local authorities in dealing with the financial effects of emergencies, allows local authorities to provide relief and carry out immediate works to safeguard life or property or prevent suffering or inconvenience to affected communities in the knowledge that 85 per cent. of all eligible expenditure above each authority's threshold will be reimbursed by grant under the scheme.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the total capacity and *(b)* the total number of abattoirs in Scotland in 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994; and how many abattoirs in Scotland now conform to the requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

Sir Hector Monro: My Department does not hold data on the capacity of slaughterhouses. The number of abattoirs are as follows:

Year	*Number of abattoirs*[1]
1979	91
1984	75
1989	68
1994	49

[1] This figure includes slaughterhouses on the Scottish islands which operate for a short period each year and have a very low throughput.

Currently, 49 abattoirs are licensed under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992; of these, 17 are operating under a temporary derogation for structural upgrading.

Flooding

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what specific assistance will be available to local authorities to undertake *(a)* temporary and *(b)* permanent flood prevention schemes in Strathclyde during the current financial year and in future years; if he will make additional capital and revenue funding available for flood prevention schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Strathclyde regional council is the flood prevention authority for its area. For immediate expenditure on emergency works and temporary repairs to existing flood defence works following severe flooding the Bellwin scheme will apply. The Scottish Office will by this means meet 85 per cent. of current expenditure incurred over the council's threshold.

In the longer term, the council and its successor authorities will wish to consider what use it should make of its powers under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961. Government grant of 50 per cent. is available towards the eligible costs of approved schemes. I can assure the hon. Member that any proposals for flood prevention schemes will be given prompt consideration and will be taken into account when setting the capital allocations at that time.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the definition of insurable as described in the Bellwin scheme; how this will apply to the property which was insurable, but not insured, in the recent floods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The cost of dealing with any damage or loss that is insurable under normal insurance policies is not eligible for grant under the Bellwin scheme. This applies irrespective of whether or not the damage or loss in question was in fact insured.

It is for local authorities themselves to make their own insurance arrangements. Grant under the Bellwin scheme is not intended to recompense authorities for loss or damage against which they could have insured but chose in fact not to do so. Local authorities are therefore expected to demonstrate when submitting claims in respect of loss or damage to their own property that the property was not insurable in the normally accepted sense, and to indicate in their claims whether or not any property covered by the claim was insured, and if not, to give reasons why insurance had not been taken.

These requirements are contained in Scottish Office Finance Circular No. 6/1990, which sets out the rules governing the Bellwin scheme and are those which will be applied to any claims from local authorities arising from the Strathclyde flooding.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what security arrangements were in place during his visit to the Paisley flood sites in the period between Christmas and new year; how often he has made official visits under these arrangements since he assumed his Cabinet post; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: It would be inappropriate on security grounds to give this information.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment he has made of the causes of abnormal flooding in Renfrew district during recent months; what future measures he will take to identify the causes of such flooding; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will assist the financing of comprehensive hydrological study to examine the underlying reasons for the floods in Strathclyde during December 1994; if he will instruct appropriate departments of the Scottish Office to establish a task force to act as lead agency in such a study; if he will instruct or assist the development of related detailed hydrological studies of smaller geographical areas where flooding occurred; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The floods were a consequence of exceptional rainfall leading to unprecedented flows in rivers over much of Strathclyde. It is important to record and analyse the details of the floods and their effects. My right hon. Friend is pleased to announce that he has agreed to pay £10,000 towards the costs of a comprehensive hydrological study being promoted by the Clyde River purification board. His officials will participate in the development and management of the study. Similarly there is likely to be a need for a separate study of urban watercourses and culverts and their role in flooding. Strathclyde regional council is the responsible authority and it is for it to take the lead. But here again the Scottish

Office is ready to provide support to Strathclyde regional council, both through a contribution to costs and participation in a steering group, should the council decide to promote such a study.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what ways the Clyde port authority has changed its policies and responsibilities for preventing floods since it was privatised; if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the location and *(b)* frequency of dredging operations for each of the three years which (i) preceded and (ii) followed privatisation; what assessment he has made of the responsibility of Clyde port authority in the recent floods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Clydeport Ltd.—previously Clyde Port Authority—is not responsible for flood prevention. The company has a permissive power to dredge the Clyde river channel to the extent necessary for the maintenance and improvement of the port.

Information about Clydeport Ltd.'s dredging operations is not readily available in the format requested. The information set out in the table has been supplied by Clydeport Ltd. but locations and frequencies vary according to operational requirements.

Quantities dredged per annum from common river channel and Clydeport Operations Limited's operational docks and berths between Broomielaw and Newshot Light/Dalmuir

Year	*Quantity (m^3)*
1989	228,872
1990	155,954
1991	222,199
1992	56,664
1993	62,825
1994	135,943
1995 (planned)	96,951

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his advice to residents who were victims of the Strathclyde floods who have to return to their homes before flood prevention measures have been put in place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Government fully recognise that residents remain concerned and will expect that immediate action can be taken to protect their property against the possibility of a recurrence. However the extent and priority of any flood prevention measures are matters for the regional council. Accordingly concerned residents should take every opportunity to let the council know how they feel and press for priority to be accorded to addressing their particular situations.

In considering its response the council will be aware of the very extreme nature of the recent events and will have to make a careful assessment of risk to determine the degree of protection which any schemes it decides to implement might afford. Pending the development of any permanent flood prevention measures, councils may be able to advise on precautions residents could take to minimise damage to their property in the event of further flooding.

Natural Disasters (Legislation)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Acts of Parliament which apply to the prevention, operational action and relief of floods and other natural disasters in Scotland; if he will list the main provisions of each Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The relevant Acts of Parliament with their main provisions are as follows:

Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961 which empowers regional and islands councils to carry out work to prevent or mitigate flooding of land in their area, not being agricultural land, so far as they think fit—section 1. Any work other than maintenance and management operations must be authorised by the Secretary of State—section 4.

Coast Protection Act 1949 which empowers coast protection authorities (islands councils and councils of regions adjoining the sea) to carry out such coast protection work as may appear to them to be necessary or expedient for the protection of any land in their area—section 4. Certain coast protection work must be authorised by the Secretary of State— section 6.

Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973—section 84—which allows local authorities to incur expenditure in taking action to avert, alleviate or eradicate in their area or among its inhabitants the effects or potential effects of an emergency or disaster involving destruction of or danger to life or property. Local authorities are also empowered to make grants or loans in respect of such action taken by others.

Civil Protection in Peacetime Act 1986 which allows local authorities to use civil defence resources in taking action to avert, alleviate or eradicate in their area or among its inhabitants the effects or potential effects of an emergency or disaster involving destruction of or danger to life or property notwithstanding that the event is unconnected with any form of hostile attack by a foreign power—section 2.

Local Government and Housing Act 1989—section 5—which empowers the Secretary of State to establish a scheme for the giving of financial assistance to local authorities in respect of expenditure incurred by them on, or in connection with, the taking of immediate action (whether by the carrying out of works or otherwise) to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience, in their area or among their inhabitants. The expenditure must have been incurred as a result of an emergency or disaster involving destruction of or danger to life on property.

Land Drainage (Scotland) Act 1958 which enables the owner of agricultural land, subject to authorisation by an improvement order made by the Secretary of State, to carry out such drainage work as will improve drainage or will prevent or mitigate flooding or erosion—section 1.

The Agriculture Act 1970—section 29—empowers Ministers to make schemes for the provision of nationally-funded capital grants. Statutory Instrument 1989 No. 128 (as varied) gives effect to the Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme—nationally. Under the scheme, grants are available for the improvement or alteration of the banks or channels of watercourses or other agricultural flood prevention works to provide or improve the drainage of agricultural land, or to prevent flooding or erosion of agricultural land.

The Agricultural Act 1970—sections 92–94 as amended by the Local Government and Planning (Scotland) 1982—section 21—empowers river purification boards and islands councils to provide and operate flood warning systems for their areas.

Incomes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail for each of the years since 1979–80 the household income distribution in Scotland, grouped into deciles for each year and expressed in both cash terms and at April 1994 prices, expressing them both before and after housing costs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information in the form requested is not available. However, the Scottish "Abstract of Statistics" provides a breakdown of average weekly household income and expenditure in Scotland by different income bands. A copy is available in the Library.

Housing

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households are on the housing waiting lists of *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* new towns and *(c)* Scottish Homes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Reliable information is not held centrally.

Police Overtime

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police officers *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* in Grampian have submitted claims for (i) casual overtime, (ii) four or more separate periods of half hour casual overtime per week and (iii) three separate periods of half hour casual overtime per week, in the last full six month period for which records are available: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many homes in Scotland have been repossessed as a result of mortgage arrears for each of the years since 1982–83.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We do not hold this information centrally. However, figures supplied by the Council of Mortgage Lenders suggest that, in 1993, 2,330 properties were taken into possession in Scotland. This represents 0.29 per cent. of the total number of properties with mortgages outstanding, which is around half the proportion for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients are waiting for hospital treatment in January 1995; and what were the figures for each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Information on numbers of patients waiting for in-patient and day case treatment for 30 September 1994, the latest date for which information is centrally available, and for each of the previous four years, is shown in the table. Information on numbers of patients waiting for out-patient treatment is not centrally available.

NHSiS—waiting lists[1]; by type of patient; as at 30 September

	In-patients	*Day cases*
1990	59,483	17,892
1991	61,550	20,243
1992	61,646	22,228
1993	55,518	26,728
1994[2]	51,663	28,048

[1] True waiting list. Excludes repeat and deferred waiting lists.
[2] Provisional.

NHS Contracts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the value of NHS contracts placed with non-NHS providers *(a)* in total, *(b)* by each health board, *(c)* by each general practitioner fundholding practice and *(d)* by each trust.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The total value of NHS contracts placed with non-NHS providers in 1993–94 was £16.255 million provisional figure only. This total is analysed by each health board as follows:

Health Board	*£000*
Argyll and Clyde	1,066
Ayrshire and Arran	1,504
Borders	1,355
Dumfries and Galloway	50
Fife	405
Forth Valley	368
Grampian	233
Greater Glasgow	7,730
Highland	142
Lanarkshire	2,625
Lothian	301
Orkney	2
Shetland	—
Tayside	474
Western Isles	—
Total	16,255

The value of NHS contracts placed with non-NHS providers by each general practitioner fundholding practice and by each trust is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health boards also have contracts with local authorities, hospices and voluntary agencies where these organisations are registered charities undertaking specific contracted activities but information on these is no longer collected centrally.

NHS Services (Privatisation)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what NHS services have been privatised and which have been market tested since April 1991.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Since April 1991, the Building Division of the Common Services Agency of the NHS in Scotland has been privatised through a sale as a going concern following a tendering exercise.

Over the same period the following services have been market tested to a differing extent by health boards, the Common Services Agency and NHS trusts:

cleaning
catering
portering
grounds and estates maintenance
linen and laundry
electrical and mechanical engineering
plumbing
vehicle maintenance
painting
financial
transport
switchboard
joinerwork
wheelchair technical support
clinical waste
window cleaning
air ambulance
sterilising

The majority of contracts for these services have been won by in-house teams and the rest by private contractors.

Health Education Authority

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to change the funding structure or remit of the Health Education Authority.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Responsibility for the Health Education Authority lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The comparable Scottish organisation is the Health Education Board for Scotland. Matters such as funding and functions will fall to be considered in the quinquennial review of the board, which will be set in train in 1995.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Veal Crates

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many veal crates have been *(a)* manufactured in and *(b)* exported from the United Kingdom in each year since 1985.

Mr. Needham: This information is not available from official statistics.

Saudi Arabia (Trade Mission)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost to his Department of its support of the trade mission of November 1994 to Saudi Arabia; and from which subheads of which votes these funds were taken.

Mr. Needham: There was no expenditure incurred by the Department of Trade and Industry for the British Aerospace Trade mission which took place in November 1994. The support offered for this trade mission was purely advisory.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Heseltine: DTI Ministers determine the policy and resources framework within which each of our agencies operates, but do not normally become involved in the management of the agencies. The detail of the framework for each agency is set out in a framework document, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Copyright Directive

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his current timetable for implementation of the copyright term of the protection directive.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The directive requires member states to comply with its provisions by 1 July this year, and my intention is to lay the necessary implementing legislation before Parliament in sufficient time for it to come into force on that date.

Post Office

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names and number of main post offices or Crown offices which have been converted by Post Office Counters Ltd. since 1988 into agency offices run under franchise agreements.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand from the Post Office that since 1988, Post Office Counters Ltd. has converted 114 Crown post offices to agency offices operated under franchise agreements. A copy of the list of these offices is being placed in the Library of the House.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the quality of service provided by insolvency practitioners in relation to the preparation of initial misconduct reports in the light of the National Audit Office's report on company directors' disqualification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Following the recommendations contained in the reports of the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee, the Insolvency Service's disqualification unit has been monitoring the effectiveness of its programme to improve the quality and timeliness of initial misconduct reports submitted by insolvency practitioners. During the half-year ended 30 June 1994, 58 per cent. of reports received were considered to be of an acceptable quality across a range of criteria, including timeliness; during the six months ended 31 December 1994 this increased to 80 per cent.

Further improvements are expected when the unit commences a programme of guidance visits to practitioners who have a poor record of reporting; and after the introduction of revised report forms under the Government's de-regulation initiative.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give details of the costs and savings which would result from contracting out the mechanical processing work of the Insolvency Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Stoy Hayward Consulting concluded that the case for contracting out and value for money grounds needed to be tested; and that a bidding process would provide such a test.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are expected to be the redundancy costs which would result from contracting out the mechanical processing work of the Insolvency Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decision to contract out any functions of official receivers has been taken. It is therefore too early to say what, if any, redundancies would occur if such a decision were taken and what the related costs would be.

In the event that such a decision were taken, however, every possible step would be taken to avoid redundancies wherever possible.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will now publish the Stoy Hayward report.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Stoy Hayward's report on options for involving the private sector in the work of the official receivers was published on 10 October 1994 by placing copies in the Libraries of the House and DTI library. The published version of the report does not

include the appendices produced by the consultants as these contain financial information which is commercially confidential.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what legal advice he has received on the impact that privatisation of the Insolvency Service could have on the disqualification of directors and the prosecution of directors and bankrupts and on the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decision to contract out work of the official receivers has yet been taken; any decision would be subject to the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 and the procedures applicable to contracting out which are set out in it.

In the circumstances, it is far too early to consider the issue of Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations, the implications of which may not become clear until the nature of proposals in any bidding process could be assessed.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what power the Department of Trade and Industry's Insolvency Service has over the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales or registered professional bodies if it is found that they have ignored their own bye laws on a practitioner's duty to the public.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Insolvency Service, through frequent contact with officials of the recognised professional bodies and formal visits, seeks to ensure that each body deals with complaints against its members fairly, promptly and in accordance with its own rules, and that there is consistency between the bodies. Consideration would be given to withdrawal of recognition if a body was found to be acting in disregard of its rules.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to ensure that the facilities of the Insolvency Service continue to be provided within the public sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The policy of Her Majesty's Government is that where work can appropriately be undertaken in the private sector it should be, subject to that representing value for money.

In the event that a decision is taken to contract out certain of the functions of official receivers to the private sector, official receivers, as statutory office holders, would continue to be legally responsible for the discharge of those functions. Furthermore, the work undertaken by Stoy Hayward concluded that the contracting out of administrative functions would enable official receivers to concentrate on their investigative role.

Paper Products (EC Preference Scheme)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the details of the outcome of negotiations with the European Community on revision of the generalised system of preferences scheme and its impact upon paper products.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Negotiations on the European Community's new generalised system of preferences were concluded on 19 December 1994. Paper products are classified in chapters 47 to 49 of the common customs tariff. All imports of such products classified in chapter 47 enter the Community free of duty. Paper products in chapter 48 of the tariff, imported from developing countries under the GSP scheme, enter the Community free of duty. Of those products in chapter 49 of the tariff, which are subject to duty, most are on the list of products categorised as being "sensitive" for Community industry. Imports of these products from GSP countries will therefore be charged 70 per cent. of the normal duty. Because imports of paper products from Brazil have become highly competitive, they will no longer be eligible for GSP benefits from 1 January 1996.

Electricity Companies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation to prevent foreign ownership of regional electricity companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have no such plans.

Nuclear Power

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make a decision about the application by Nuclear Electric plc to build Sizewell C power station in Suffolk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Both relevant planning authorities, the Suffolk county council and the Suffolk Coastal district council, have objected to the application. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is therefore statutorily obliged to call for a public inquiry to be held. Details of the public inquiry will be announced as soon as practicable.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the outcome of the nuclear review.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 19 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *239*.

Radar Jammers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to prevent the sale in the United Kingdom of non-transmitter radar jammers.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Responsibility for the regulation of civil radio use in the United Kingdom has been delegated to the Radiocommunications Agency, under its chief executive Mr. Jim Norton. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Colin Pickthall, dated 16 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your Question about the sale of radar jammers.

I presume you are concerned about equipment which it is claimed can either simply detect (ie receive) the operation of a police radar speedmeter or in some cases neutralise it. Under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1967 Orders can be made prohibiting the import, sale, manufacture or possession of radio apparatus which has the ability to cause interference to other radio use. The majority of radar detectors are simply radio receivers and are therefore inherently incapable of transmitting or causing interference to other radio use. Consequently it is not possible to make an Order under the Act prohibiting their sale, etc.

An Order could only be made in respect of those radar detectors which it is claimed neutralise police radars, by reflecting their signal,

if it could be proved that they were so capable. To date we have no such evidence.

It is however an offence under the provisions of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 (the 1949 Act) to use any apparatus for the purpose of unauthorised reception or interfering with wireless telegraphy. Under this Act there is no bar as to who may instigate proceedings for offences under the Act. The Courts have also previously held that to offer for sale radio equipment which cannot be lawfully used is to incite members of the public to contravene the 1949 Act contrary to common law. Where radio equipment has been designed to be used for, or is used in the pursuit of other illegal activity, it is normal for the police or other relevant enforcement body to take the lead in any investigation. The Agency willingly assists in the investigation, by providing legal or technical advice, if asked to do so.

I hope this is helpful.

Textiles

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent changes there have been in the criteria or regulations for the granting of *(a)* regional selective assistance and *(b)* other development aid for expansion by textile firms in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The award of RSA and other development aid in support of expansion projects being undertaken by firms in the textiles and clothing sector is governed by EC state aid rules. Uncertainties arose last year about the need to give prior notification to the Commission of proposed aid to such projects. The temporary procedures introduced while member states reviewed the situation with the Commission, have now been removed and RSA and other forms of Government assistance continues to be available under established criteria.

Mortgage Interest Insurance

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the average insurance premium for a mortgagor wishing to take out insurance to cover mortgage interest payments in the event of unemployment and the total annual cost of such premiums for all those with mortgages.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *390–91*.

Self-regulatory Professional Bodies

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to institute an independent watchdog to oversee professional bodies which have self-regulatory powers.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have no plans to establish a body to oversee professional bodies which have self-regulatory powers.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received that the recognised professional bodies, to whom he has granted self-regulatory powers, are not acting within their own guidelines on the question of integrity within their complaints procedure.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have, on occasion, received representations that a complaint made against a member of a recognised professional body has not been dealt with fairly and/or promptly. Such representations are taken up by my officials.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to take action against members of registered professional bodies who fail to work within their own fundamental principles.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Where a recognised professional body is satisfied that a member has not observed the rules and regulations of the body which governs his professional conduct, it is a matter for that body to decide what disciplinary action should be taken.

Insolvency Practitioners

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to ensure that the fees of insolvency practitioners and the professionals they employ are levied at a fixed rate.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In most types of insolvency, the creditors fix the fees of the insolvency practitioner, subject to review by the court. In an administrative receivership, the fee payable is a matter for agreement between the debenture holder appointing him, and the insolvency practitioner, although it may be reviewed by the court on the application of a liquidator. It would not be practicable to specify rates of payment for services provided to an insolvency practitioner by other professionals.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to require that an insolvency practitioner appointed as a receiver should be a person different from the accountant or insolvency practitioner which prepared the report on the company's affairs.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The arguments for and against preventing accountants who act as advisers to banks from acting as administrative receivers of client companies have been considered and I am not convinced that the practice should be proscribed.

Company Liquidations

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will introduce legislation to extend the receiver's duty of care to include the unsecured creditors and/or a guarantor of a company in receivership.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I have no plans to do so.

British Coal Assets

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations underlay his decision not to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the proposed acquisition by R.J.B. Mining of certain assets of British Coal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's decision not to refer the proposed acquisition of certain assets of British Coal, namely the Harworth methane power generating plant and the minerals and aggregates, other than coal, extracted from opencast sites of Central North, South and North East Regional Coal companies, was in accordance with the Director General of Fair Trading's advice, which is confidential. My right hon. Friend took into account all relevant factors and concluded that the case raised no concerns justifying a reference.

Offshore Oil Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to ensure that vessels and equipment for the new offshore Atlantic oil fields are built in Britain.

Mr. Eggar: A number of the oil and gas developments in the Atlantic are likely to use floating production facilities and my Department established a working group last year to assess the demand and United Kingdom companies' ability to compete for these facilities. The group was also asked to identify steps to strengthen United Kingdom competitiveness and its recommendations are being pursued with the industry. As a result of this work, the competitive position of United Kingdom companies has already improved.

Cable Damage

Mr. David Young: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the estimated cost of repairing damage to other undertakers' cables by NYNEX in the Bolton metro area covered by North West Gas Board and North West Electricity.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Cable operators' streetworks are subject to the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, which makes an undertaker liable to pay compensation for damage caused to another undertaker's apparatus. The estimated cost of repair for damage is therefore a matter for NYNEX.

HPC Virus

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to review the law of intellectual property in the United Kingdom following the decision of the High Court of Justice that Chiron Corporation of California has intellectual ownership of the virus HPC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: There is no reason to review existing patent law following the High Court decision in the Chiron case. The law is designed to encourage research and development in all fields of technology, including biotechnology, where inventions satisfying the criteria of patentability—novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability—are eligible for protection.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Support

Mr. Austin Michell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the annual cost to the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years of EEC expenditure on agricultural support.

Mr. Jack: The Exchequer cost of agricultural support under EC schemes within the UK is set out in table 9.1 of the editions of the "Agriculture in UK" from 1988 to 1993, and for years prior to 1988 in table 9.1 of the Government White Paper, "The Annual Review of Agriculture". These publications have been deposited in the Library of the House of Commons. The 1994 edition of "Agriculture in the UK" will be published in March. The UK also contributes to the cost of EC agricultural support in other member states through our net contributions to the EC budget.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tonnage of each CAP product was dumped on world markets in *(a)* 1974 and *(b)* each of the past three years; and what was the loss per tonne incurred in each case.

Mr. Jack: Certain agricultural exports benefit from refunds which bridge the gap between EU internal and world price levels. The total volumes of CAP products exported from the EU in 1974 and in the last three years are given in the first table.

Since only some of these exports are subsidised by refunds, it is not possible to give a rate of expenditure per tonne for each commodity. Total expenditure on export refunds by commodity is shown in the second table.

Total exports outside EC: 1974, 1991–1993

Units: Metric tonnes

Products	*1974*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Cereals	9,288,000	21,801,506	27,095,031	23,616,767
Rice	291,000	501,722	495,181	244,510
Sugar	270,000	4,528,622	4,663,957	5,414,515
Olive oil	12,300	175,751	190,265	182,412
Oilseeds	255,400	126,729	272,133	128,396
Fruit and Veg Fresh	n/a	3,199,957	3,191,777	4,244,761
Fruit and Veg Processed	n/a	359,525	342,701	350,209
Wine	360,800	1,057,813	1,069,320	1,418,278
Tobacco	n/a	139,355	119,527	147,056
Cheese	188,500	483,582	466,229	524,034
Butter	118,500	301,636	223,616	184,563
Skimmed Milk	339,000	241,834	384,471	276,338
Beef and Veal	178,000	1,059,232	1,051,712	1,029,904
Sheep Meat	2,900	38,862	7,712	6,676
Poultry	141,000	469,333	511,497	652,320
Pigmeat	271,000	366,226	244,729	361,624
Eggs	31,300	104,873	106,401	110,089

Source:
1974 figures: The Agricultural Situation in the Community 1976 Report.
1991–93 figures: COMEXT.
1974 figures are expressed to nearest 100 tonnes.

Export refunds on:	*MUA*[1] *1974*	*MECU 1991*	*MECU 1992*	*MECU 1993*
Cereals	76	3,602	3,140	2,789
Rice	0.5	78	92	59
Sugar	8	1,251	1,306	1,531
Olive Oil	0.8	112	48	69
Oilseeds	0	0	0	0
Fruit and Veg—Fresh	18	77	92	156
Fruit and Veg—Processed	[2]—	18	25	31
Wine	0.1	56	77	100
Tobacco	0	65	57	36
Milk Products	344	2,249	2,056	2,287
Beef	55	1,282	1,333	1,712
Sheepmeat	N/A	0	0	0
Pigmeat	56	199	130	193
Eggs and Poultry	17	169	193	291
Total	575.4	9,158	8,549	9,254

Source:
1974: 1991–93 FEOGA Financial Reports.
Notes:
[1] mua = millions of units of account.
[2] For 1974 expenditure for fruit and veg refers to fresh and processed as a whole.
Exchange Rates:
1974: 1 u.a = £0.5098
1991: 1 ecu = £0.69973
1992: 1 ecu = £0.70765
1993: 1 ecu = £0.78627

Fishing

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his letter, reference 81869, of 7 November 1994, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what discussions he is having with the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation Scientific Council on the moratorium for the fishing for capelin *(a)* off east Greenland and *(b)* on the Grand banks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: There is a moratorium on the fishery for capelin on the Grand banks for 1995. The Scientific Council of the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation will make its recommendations for the 1996 total allowable catch to the annual meeting of NAFO in September 1995, at which the United Kingdom will be represented within the EU delegation.

The NAFO Scientific Council does not give advice on the capelin stock at East Greenland, Iceland and Jan Mayen. This is provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and management decisions are taken jointly by the Greenlandic, Icelandic and Norwegian authorities. The ICES advice in May 1994 was for a TAC for 1994–1995 of 1,430,000 tonnes.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date in 1994 he released the first suckler cow premium advance subsidy cheques to English farmers.

Mr. Jack: The first advance payments of the 1994 suckler cow premium were sent to farmers in England on 1 November 1994. This is the earliest date permitted by the EU regulations.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of the members of his think tank on CAP reform were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Jack: None of the members of the CAP policy group were identified by the public appointments unit. Members were recruited from among contacts known to the Department, on the basis of their individual ideas and reputation for imaginative thinking, as well as their practical experience.

Infant Formulae

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends making the United Kingdom regulations to implement EC directives 91/321 and 95/52 on the composition, labelling and marketing of infant and follow-on formulae.

Mrs. Browning: The infant formula and follow-on formula regulations 1995 have been laid before Parliament today and will come into force on 1 March 1995 to implement the relevant EC legislation.

Following consultation, the Government have concluded that the current controls on advertising, which have been operated voluntarily by the industry, should be maintained where possible. We have therefore sought to incorporate the existing arrangements into the new regulations.

Agricultural Wages Board

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the employers' response to the consultation regarding the decision to retain the agricultural wages board.

Mr. Jack: The consultation period on the future operation of the agricultural wages board ran from July to November 1993. Over that period, almost 4,000 responses were received with only 10 advocating abolition of the board. Most employers and organisations representing employers' interests recommended retention; however, those responses recommending abolition came from employer interests. An analysis of responses was placed in the Library of the House on 9 June 1994. We also took into account comments received after the close of the formal consultation period.

Some further representations suggesting abolition of the board came from employers and organisations representing employers in the horticulture, poultry and mushroom sectors, with most noting concerns for their sectors of the particular impact of the 1994 AWB minimum wage settlement. However, the views of the great majority of employers and the main representative organisations remained unchanged.

Ms Harman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the likely effect of the decision to retain the agricultural wages board on wage rates and wage rate differentials in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Jack: The agricultural wages board is an independent organisation and reaches its own decisions on minimum wage rates and differentials. It is not possible to predict the future impact of the board's determinations on levels of remuneration in the agricultural sector.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on calves from Ireland being exported to the continent through Plymouth docks; and whether the British regulations as regards journey plans and feeding, watering and resting intervals apply to them.

Mrs. Browning: Movements of such animals from the Republic or Northern Ireland are covered by the provisions of the Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1992 once the animals come within British jurisdiction and hauliers are required to comply with those provisions.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many animals were classed as too unwell to travel from Plymouth docks to France on the night of 19 December 1994;

(2) what assessment he has made of whether the welfare of livestock being transported abroad can be adequately accounted for when said livestock is in lorries on boats and the drivers of the lorries are not on the boats; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make a statement on the lorries exporting livestock from Plymouth docks on the night of 19 December 1994; how many lorries were turned away; and for what reasons.

Mrs. Browning: None of the animals inspected at the dock while in their lorries were considered too unwell to travel. However two lorries loaded with sheep were turned away because the veterinary inspection for health certification purposes had taken place more than 48 hours prior to their loading—the maximum period permitted under EC health rules. The ship sailed with 12 lorries on board and their drivers. Officials are now satisfied with the arrangements made by the shipping company to provide standby drivers on the French side for any lorry not accompanied by its driver. The vessel sails with a veterinary surgeon who assumes responsibility for the welfare of the animals until such time as they are driven away from the port of disembarkation.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the recent obstruction of vehicles carrying live animals for slaughter abroad.

Mrs. Browning: We deplore the activities of those who would disrupt by violent means the lawful activities of those engaged in this trade.

Abattoirs

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was *(a)* the total capacity and *(b)* the total number of abattoirs in England in 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994; and how many abattoirs in England now conform to the requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

Mrs. Browning: The number of licensed red meat abattoirs in England were:

1979: 977
1984: 961
1989: 689
1994: 424

In 1994 all 424 abattoirs were licensed under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992; 274 were operating under temporary derogations while upgrading their premises to comply in full with the structural requirements.

The Department does not hold figures on the total capacity of abattoirs.

Veal

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what public funding has been made available to promote the marketing of humanely reared veal in each of the years since the use of veal crates was banned in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Browning: The marketing development scheme is available for a broad range of marketing projects. This could include the marketing of humanely-produced veal, but no application has to date been made for this purpose.

Farm Animal Welfare Council

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who are the members currently appointed to the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Mrs. Browning: The current membership of the Farm Animal Welfare Council is as follows:

Professor Sir Colin R. W. Spedding CBE—Chairman
Mr. C. B. Atkinson
Dr. M. R. Baxter
Mr. M. G. Berry
Rev. A. L. Birbeck MBE
Dr. W. J. M. Black JP
Professor D. M. Broom
Mr. J. A. R. Dewhirst
Mr. T. C. Harris
Mrs. F. F. Hodgson
Mr. C. T. P. Hollands OBE
Mrs. J. A. MacArthur Clark
Mr. R. Macpherson
Miss C. A. Milburn
Dr. M. Pattison
Mr. F. E. Shields MBE
Mr. P. F. Staines MBE
Mr. J. G. Thomas
Mrs. J. M. Tumbull JP
Mr. A. Watkins
Mrs. T. M. Wickham
Dr. A. C. Winter

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on actions taken by his Department in response to recommendation 92–7 of the air accidents investigation branch report No. 2/92.

Mr. Soames: My Department, in conjunction with the Civil Aviation authority, has actioned the recommendation as follows:

(i) Civil operators continue to be notified of intense military low flying through the notice to airmen system.

(ii) Aeronautical information circular 63/1992 was published to provide civil users with information about the United Kingdom military low flying system, and advice on how to reduce the risk of confliction with military low-flying aircraft. a revised version, AIC 89/1993, was issued in June 1993.

Additionally, in response to recommendation 92–8 of the same Report, my Department has provided details, for inclusion on Civil Aviation Authority charts, of the

unidirectional flows which apply to military aircraft in areas of greatest density of activity or where activity is restricted to a narrow corridor between avoidance areas.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions are imposed on the activation of on-board electronic counter-measures equipment by aircrew performing simulated low-level attacks on threat emitters located outside range areas in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: There are strict procedures covering the activation of on-board electronic countermeasures equipment and no airborne jamming is permitted without prior authorisation having been granted or without two-way communications with the controlling authority.

Skyguard

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if aircrew carrying out sorties in the United Kingdom low flying system are informed of the locations of Skyguard radars deployed as electronic threat emitters in the low flying system.

Mr. Soames: When Skyguard is deployed outside RAF Spadeadam as an electronic warfare threat emitter, aircrews participating in the exercise may be informed of the location depending on the nature of the exercise.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and locations of deployments of Skyguard radars in the electronic warfare threat simulator role beyond the Spadeadam range boundaries since January 1992.

Mr. Soames: The dates and locations of deployments of the Skyguard radar in the electronic warfare threat role outside RAF Spadeadam since January 1992 are as follows:

Date	*Location*
17–22 May 1992	South Wales
25–29 January 1993	Sanquhar, Dumfries
11–16 July 1993	South Wales
26 November–3 December 1993	Tiverton, Devon
6–10 December 1993	Hunterston Power Station, Strathclyde
11–15 April 1994	RAF Odiham area, Hampshire
11–15 July 1994	Rhayader, Powys
24 September–1 October 1994	Liskeard, Cornwall
6–10 November 1994	Oban, Strathclyde

Tornado F3 Squadrons

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF Tornado F3 squadrons will be assigned to the NATO immediate reaction forces (air) from January 1995; and what proposals he has to increase this number.

Mr. Soames: It is not our practice to disclose such details of assigned forces. The annual statement on the defence estimates does, however, describe the assets planned to be assigned against NATO reaction forces generally.

Holloman Air Force Base

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have been held with *(a)* the United States authorities and *(b)* the German authorities concerning the development of facilities at Holloman air force base, New Mexico, for Royal Air force training.

Mr. Soames: No such discussions have been held.

NATO Reaction Forces (Air)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to designate specific air bases in the United Kingdom as locations for deployment and joint training by units of the NATO reaction forces (air).

Mr. Soames: None.

RAF Spadeadam

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the payments made by foreign air forces for use of the Spadeadam electronic warfare range facilities are credited to RAF Spadeadam's own financial accounts.

Mr. Soames: Payments made to the RAF by foreign air forces for the use of the range at RAF Spadeadam are credited to RAF Spadeadam's budget.

Slovakia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the aims of the visit of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence to Slovakia in August 1994; and what agreements were reached with the Slovak authorities as a result of that visit.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence visited Solvakia in August 1994 to represent the United Kingdom at the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the Slovak national uprising. During discussions with the Slovak Defence Minister it was agreed that units of the armed forces of the Slovak Republic and of the United Kingdom should in future co-operate through a series of joint military exercises and that our respective military authorities would meet jointly to develop proposals. It was further agreed that this would be complemented by a programme of closer and more substantial military contracts.

RAF Training (Morocco)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the dates, locations, and numbers and types of aircraft involved in the next planned Royal Air Force training deployment to Morocco.

Mr. Soames: On current plans, six Royal Air Force Tornado GR1B aircraft will detach to Sidi Slimane air base in Morocco from 24 to 31 March to participate in a bilateral exercise with the Moroccan air force.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the world wide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Ms Campbell) on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *913*.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether United Kingdom forces in battle during *(a)* the Falklands and *(b)* the Gulf conflicts deployed any of their stocks of German manufactured anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Soames: The UK has not held stocks of German manufactured anti-personnel mines since 1983. The last such mines still held at the time of the Falklands conflict were obsolete and were not deployed with British forces.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which manufacturers are currently supplying the United Kingdom armed forces with anti-personnel land mines, including those with self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types of anti-personnel land mines, including those with self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms, are currently in use or stocked by the United Kingdom armed forces.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom armed forces have in stock and available for use the following anti-personnel land mines:

(a) Mine, anti-personnel C3 (Elsie)

(b) Mine, anti-personnel M18 A1 (Claymore)

(c) Mine, anti-personnel L10 (Ranger)

None of the above types have self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what definitions are used by his Department for *(a)* self-destruct and *(b)* self-neutralising anti-personnel land mines.

Mr. Freeman: The Ministry of Defence is using the definitions included in the draft of protocol II of the UN weaponry convention, namely:

(a) Self-destruction mechanism means an incorporated automatically functioning mechanism which secures the destruction of the munition.

(b) Self-neutralising mechanism means an incorporated automatically functioning mechanism which renders a munition inoperable.

Service Personnel

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the statistics for divorces amongst service personnel for the period 1990 to 1994.

Mr. Soames: The number of recorded divorces for Army and Royal Air Force personnel is as follows:

	Army	*RAF*
1990	1,409	867
1991	1,352	862
1992	1,347	824
1993	1,157	779

Figures for calendar year 1994 are not yet available.

The information requested for Royal Navy personnel is not held in a form which is readily available and could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will identify, by rank and by service, the entitlement to free trips home each year by personnel serving overseas; and if he will set out the cost of this provision for the financial year 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Soames: Generally, only serving personnel who are married but not accompanied by their wives, or single personnel under 25, with an expectation of at least 12 months service overseas, have the option of a return trip to the United Kingdom at public expense. Subsequently, there is an entitlement for a further return trip at public expense for each additional year overseas. This entitlement is not based on rank or service. Among the exceptions to the standard scheme are the Ascension Islands, Diego Garcia and the Falkland Islands, where service personnel in other domestic circumstances may also be entitled to such travel. Details of the costs of this provision are not held separately and could not be provided.

Civil Servants

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *897*, if he will set out those officials who left the Defence Services Organisation to join defence or defence-related companies.

Mr. Freeman: Approval was given for the following applications from two officers in the Defence Export Services Organisation. It is not known if they were taken up.

BAe	1 x Commander RN
Computer Devices	1 x Commander RN
EDS/Scicon	1 x Commander RN
Ferranti International	1 x Commander RN
GEC-Marconi Naval Systems	1 x Commander RN
Marconi (Underwater) Systems	1 x Commander RN
MSI Defence Systems	1 x Commander RN
NI Tech	1 x Commander RN
Vosper Thornycroft	1 x Commander RN
Yarrow Shipbuilders	1 x Commander RN

Operation Granby

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if animals are used in scientific experiments relating to illness arising out of Operation Granby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Derek Fatchett, dated 16 January 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if animals are used in scientific experiments relating to illness arising out of Operation GRANBY and if he will make a statement has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them.

3. No work is being carried out at CBDE to investigate illness which may have arisen out of Operation GRANBY.

4. However, following the Gulf conflict, increased emphasis has been placed on biological defence which primarily consists of detection and medical countermeasures. The programme of work on medical countermeasures includes the continuing study of both

vaccines and antibiotics against a range of potential biological warfare agents. This work has necessitated the use of more animals.

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many children of serving officers in each service have school fees subsidised at public expense; which schools are involved; how many children of service personnel attend each; and what was the cost of this provision for 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Soames: My Department provides support to service parents for the education of their children by means of boarding school allowance; this is paid to assist in providing a stable education for their children in the face of the domestic turbulence frequently encountered in service life. The numbers of children in receipt of boarding school allowance in the academic year 1993–94, broken down by service, was: Royal Navy 2,492; Army 6,034; Royal Air Force 4,041. The cost of this provision for 1993–94 was £113.61 million. The total estimated expenditure for financial year 1994–95 is £104 million. Total expenditure reflects both the rate of the allowance and the total number of children in receipt of the allowance per term. I am arranging for a copy of the most recent, June 1994, list of schools and the number of children attending those schools who are in receipt of boarding school allowance to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many children have benefited from the boarding school allowance in each of the last four years.

Mr. Soames: The total number of children for whom boarding school allowance was claimed in the academic years in question was:

1990–1991: 17,910
1991–1992: 16,208
1992–1993: 15,120
1993–1994: 12,567

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make statement about his future plans for the service children's boarding school allowance scheme.

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to amend the service children's boarding school allowance scheme. Service career and manpower structures and terms and conditions of service are, however, at present the subject of an independent review which I announced on 30 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *752*.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of the boarding school allowance scheme in each of the last five years; and what is the projected cost for 1995–96.

Mr. Soames: The total cost to my Department of boarding school allowance for the years in questions was:

1990–1991: £105.61 million
1991–1992: £115.35 million
1992–1993: £116.72 million
1993–1994: £113.61 million

The total estimated expenditure for financial year 1994–95 is £104 million. Total expenditure reflects both the rate of the allowance and the total number of children in receipt of the allowance per term and it is not therefore possible to give an accurate assessment of the likely costs for 1995–96, although they are estimated to be similar to the amounts for 1994–95.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the private and independent schools which take children paid for from the service boarding allowance and have had full Ofsted reports; and if he will list those schools where all of the service parents have received copies of these reports in the last two years.

Mr. Soames: The total list of Ofsted reports on schools at which children benefitting from boarding school allowance are being educated is as follows:

School	
Sherborne preparatory school, Dorset Finborough school, Suffolk Lime House school, Cumbria Roedean school, East Sussex St. Mary's school, East Sussex	Ofsted reports already forwarded to parents
Caldicott school, Bucks Perrott Hill school, Crewkerne Seaford college, near Petworth Shrewsbury school, Shropshire	Ofsted reports currently being forwarded to parents

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria his Department uses to determine whether a private or independent school may receive funding through the boarding school allowance scheme.

Mr. Soames: A list of some 800 schools in respect of which boarding school allowance may be paid is kept by my Department. Schools on the list are those which provide a normal standard of United Kingdom education and whose boarding facilities are under their immediate control. The school must also be registered with the Department for Education and must attain the acceptable standard of education as required by that Department. Further to this, the Service Children's Education Authority conducts its own school visits to satisfy itself as to the quality of accommodation and pastoral activities available.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all parents of children benefiting from the service boarding allowance have received copies of Ofsted reports made on those schools that have had a full inspection in the last two years.

Mr. Soames: My Department has been provided with copies of reports dating back to February 1993. Since April 1994, the Office for Standards in Education has included the Service Children's Education Authority on the distribution lists of their inspection reports for private and independent schools. It is my Department's policy for the SCEA to forward these reports to service personnel whose children are identified as attending those schools. Due to an administrative error, a number of recent Ofsted reports had not been passed to the SCEA for onward transmission to parents, but this situation is now being rectified.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and locations of the private and independent schools receiving moneys from the service children's boarding school allowance; and if he will give the number of service children at each of the schools listed and show how much each school is receiving.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave today to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). Information on how much each school

receives in boarding school allowance is not maintained centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

RAF Houses (Sales)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the sale price of 42 former RAF houses at Shotley gate, Ipswich.

Mr. Soames: Forty-two properties at Shotley gate were sold by competitive tender in December 1994. The price achieved is commercial-in-confidence.

Dress Allowance

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, by service, the number of spouses of serving officers who are entitled to dress allowances at public expense; and if he will identify the cost of this provision for the financial years 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Soames: No spouses of serving officers are entitled to dress allowance at public expense.

LSD Experiments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 December, *Official Report*, columns *312–13*, in what years the Moneybags experiments were carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 16 January 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 December, Official Report, Columns 312–3, asking in what years the Moneybags experiments were carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of that programme, evaluation is carried out of chemicals that may be utilised by an aggressor as a chemical warfare agent.

3. Moneybags was carried out in 1964 and was one in a series of studies carried out in the 1960s to assess the effects of LSD on troops in a military setting where the behaviour of those volunteers who had been given LSD could be compared with those control volunteers who had not been given LSD.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of LSD experiments called Recount carried out at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; in which years the Recount experiments were conducted; how many service volunteers were tested under the Recount experiments; what were the lowest and highest doses administered to service volunteers during the Recount experiments; what those volunteers were required to do under the Recount experiments and what types of animals were used; what was the conclusion of the Recount experiments; with which countries the results of those experiments were shared; and under which defence agreement the results were shared with those countries.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 16 January 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about work carried out with LSD at Porton Down known as Recount has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of that programme, evaluation is carried out of chemicals that may be utilised by an aggressor as a chemical warfare agent.

3. Recount which took place in 1966 was one in a series of studies carried out to assess the effects of LSD on troops in a military setting where the behaviour of those volunteers who had been given LSD could be compared with those control volunteers who had not been given LSD. The aim of Recount was to assess the incapacitant effects of small amounts of LSD on a unit of soldiers. Eighty men volunteered and were examined by a clinician, underwent a battery of psychometric tests and were interviewed by a psychiatrist to determine their suitability for exposure to LSD. In the event it was not found possible to include 27 men in the experiment, because their occupations (e.g., driver, cooks) were unsuitable and a further 34 were eliminated for either clinical or psychiatric reasons or a combination of both, and three were not available on the trial days. Some 28 Service volunteers participated of which 16 received LSD with the lowest and highest doses being 63 and 97 μg respectively and the other 12 were controls. This was given orally in water. No animals were involved.

4. Recount was designed to reproduce a normal military task which in this case was the deployment of an air defence regiment in the field and such an activity involved considerable use of integrative and planning skills.

5. Recount showed that the soldiers suffered a minor decrease in performance and the overall effects of this small dose of LSD were minimal. All the affected soldiers were examined and judged to have returned to normal within 24 hours.

6. It was concluded that even when a military unit is mildly affected by LSD the compensation resulting from good discipline and mutual support, between drugged and undrugged soldiers, can leave the unit relatively unaffected, in trial conditions at least, for a short task.

7. The results from Recount formed part of the technology database held by the Establishment in the area of evaluation of the potential hazard to Service personnel from possible chemical warfare agents. This information was drawn upon during the 1960s and 1970s in the agreements with our NATO allies to exchange information and so promote collaboration and cooperation in areas such as research and development in chemical and biological defence. The agreements with the United States at that time included:

a. The Technical Cooperation Programme involving UK, US, Canada and Australia which had subsumed the earlier trilateral UK/US/Canada meetings.

b. American, British, Canadian and Australian Armies (ABCA) agreement Quadripartite Working Group (QWG) on NBC defence.

c. The NATO Panel VII on chemical and biological defence.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning post-traumatic stress disorder; what research has been conducted into it by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department's response to post-traumatic stress disorder has three elements: prevention, recognition and treatment. Prevention and recognition of PTSD are combined command and medical responsibilities involving general education, pre-deployment psychiatric briefing, in-theatre education and counselling and post-deployment debriefing. The treatment of PTSD is undertaken by service psychiatric staff using internationally established and clinically recognised techniques.

Research within my Department into the disorder continues and a wide variety of PTSD-related articles written by members of the armed forces medical services have been published in professional journals. The progress of the large volume of outside research is also carefully monitored.

Cyprus

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retained sites in Cyprus were controlled by the United Kingdom under the London and Zurich agreements of 1960; how many of these retained sites have since been handed over to the control of the Cyprus Government; and at how many, and which, locations retained sites have been handed over to the Cyprus Government since the division of the island in 1974.

Mr. Soames: The treaty of establishment 1960 provided for 40 British retained sites in the Republic of Cyprus. They are listed in four schedules which form a part of that treaty, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Since then 25 complete sites and parts of six sites have been returned. Of these, eight complete sites and parts of one site have been handed back since 1974. These were as follows:

a. at the port of Limassol;
b. north-west of Zyyi (parts of);
c. at Cape Greco;
d. the water supply for the Cape Greco retained site;
e. at Polemidhia;
f. the water supply for the Polemidhia retained site;
g. north of Zyyi;
h. the water supply for the retained site north of Zyyi;
i. near Paphos, about ¼ mile from the top of Cape Paphos.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retained sites, and at which locations, remain in *(a)* southern Cyprus governed by the Cyprus Government and *(b)* northern Cyprus governed by the government of the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus.

Mr. Soames: A total of 15 British-retained sites remain in Cyprus, of which 11 are in the south of the island and four in the north. The sites are:

a. (South)
at Troodos (two sites);
at Mount Olympus;
at Nicosia airfield;
water supply for retained site at Nicosia airfield on the coast, about five miles south of Larnaca;
on the outskirts of Limassol;
water supply for the retained site on the outskirts of Limassol;
at Kissousa, including the water source and pipeline to the Akrotiri sovereign base area;
at Limassol, in Paphos road.

b. (North)
at the port in Famagusta;
in Famagusta (three sites).

Airmisses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, locations and aircraft types and nationalities involved in each incident during 1993 in which a breach of low-flying avoidance area or CANP-notified area led to the filing of an airmiss; what was the involvement of the Royal Air Force provost and security service in investigating each of the reported breaches; and what disciplinary action was taken against the aircrew involved.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is as follows. The RAF police were not involved since comprehensive investigation of airmiss reports is carried out by the joint airmiss working group. No formal disciplinary action was taken against any of the aircrew involved.

Date	*Location*	*Aircraft Types*	*Military Operator*
15 April	Milfield	PA-25 Pawnee Jaguar	United Kingdom
20 July	Eshott Glider Site	Microlight Tornado	Foreign
4 August	Winthorpe	Slingsby T61A Bulldog and Chipmunk	United Kingdom
23 August	Edgehill Glider Site	K13 glider Tornado GR1	United Kingdom
26 August	Pickering	Cessna 150 F-15	Foreign
26 August	Pickering	Cessna 150 F-15	Foreign
3 September	Bovington	K13 glider Lynx × 2	United Kingdom
14 October	Aboyne	PA-25 Pawnee Hawk	United Kingdom

Note:
It is not my Department's policy to identify the nationalities of foreign military aircrews involved in airmisses in the United Kingdom.

Exercise Hardcore

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the rules of engagement for Royal Air Force Harrier aircraft performing simulated attacks on Dutch surface-to-air missiles in Exercise Hardcore in early 1994.

Mr. Soames: RAF Harriers conducting simulated attacks against Dutch surface-to-air missiles as part of Exercise Hardcore were using the standard operating procedures and constraints laid out in the "UK Military Low Flying Handbook". No specific rules of engagement were formulated for the purposes of this exercise.

World War II (Anniversary)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1192*, what plans he has to charge war widows for joining in the programme of events planned to commemorate the end of World War II; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is not envisaged that charges will be made to any members of the public for admission to any of the Government-sponsored events.

Crown Housing Trust

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the salary and length of contract of the chief executive of the Crown housing trust; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The chief executive designate of the Crown housing trust was recruited on a three year fixed term appointment, with an annual salary of £80,000 plus possible bonuses of up to a further £20,000 linked to performance.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the last 15 years his Department has paid compensation to service personnel or former members of the armed forces who have suffered from post traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. Soames: Members of the armed forces may be subjected to traumatic experiences and may suffer stress as a result. We have a duty to ensure that they receive proper medical treatment, and the question of compensation arises only if there has been a negligent failure on the part of my Department. No-one has been compensated simply for having developed PTSD.

There has been one case in which a former soldier has been compensated for a failure to diagnose and treat PTSD. In some other claims for personal injury, PTSD may have been claimed as one of the consequences of an injury which was caused by negligence; if so, compensation may have been paid under the conventional heading of "pain and suffering". No figures are available for these cases and data is not held in a form which would enable such information to be extracted.

Sexual Orientation

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department maintains records of the sexual orientation of members of the armed forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department maintains no such records. Such information would be recorded in individual cases only where this had given grounds for administrative or disciplinary action.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 17 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mediation Service

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to establish a comprehensive national mediation service; in what way mediators will be trained and accredited; and how much he expects such a service to cost each year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no plans to establish a comprehensive national mediation service. The Lord Chancellor is currently looking at arrangements for the training and accreditation of mediators, the funding of local mediation services and a national quality assurance system.

Legal Aid

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to improve the accounting system at the Legal Aid Board so that it provides a more detailed statistical breakdown of the relative costs of different types of case.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board is currently developing new information systems which will, among other things, provide a more detailed breakdown of the costs of different types of case.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what *(a)* classes of plaintiff and *(b)* types of case which currently qualify for legal aid the Lord Chancellor envisages making ineligible for legal aid in the future; and how much public expenditure he expects to save with such measures.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor does not envisage removing either classes of plaintiff or types case from the scope of the legal aid scheme in the future. Under new proposals on which he will be consulting later in the year, it may be that, because of greater emphasis on assessments of local needs and priorities, some individual cases brought under the present system might not be brought. However, the proposals should mean that more people are assisted under legal aid than at present because of a more effective use of resources.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to publish a report on the results of the pilot projects in the use of citizens advice bureaux, law centres and other advice agencies as a means of dispensing legally aided services currently being undertaken in conjunction with the Legal Aid Board.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Legal Aid Board expects to publish the results of its non-solicitor agencies franchising pilot in the spring of 1996.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what costing analysis he has done of the proposals for the reform of the legal aid system announced at the Social Market Foundation on 11 January; and when he expects to publish this analysis.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In his speech to the Social Market Foundation, the Lord Chancellor made it plain that he was outlining his preliminary ideas in advance of a more detailed consultation paper. No costings, therefore, have as yet been done.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of the total civil legal aid budget is currently deployed through citizens advice bureaux, law centres and other such advice centres.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In 1993–94, the last complete financial year, £4.8 million was paid to law centres, citizens advice bureaux and other independent advice agencies in respect of work carried out under the legal aid scheme. This represents 0.3 per cent. of the gross amount expended on legal aid in that year.

Multi-party Actions

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to publish and to implement new rules governing the conduct of multi-party actions in the English courts.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department is fully aware of the problems arising in multi-party actions and we are considering whether, and in what way, they might be mitigated by amendments to court rules and procedures. Any proposals for change will be put out to public consultation in the usual way.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimate he has of the cost to the legal aid budget over the last five years of multi-party actions that *(a)* have come to trial and *(b)* have not come to trial.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Limitation Review

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects to complete the review of the limitation legislation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: We have been looking at the rules on the time limits in proceedings for non-accidental personal injuries and have reached the conclusion that it would not be advisable to revise this aspect of the law in isolation. We are now considering whether a comprehensive review of the law of limitation generally should be undertaken.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Two of the individuals appointed to the Lord Chancellor's Department's public positions were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

HOME DEPARTMENT

War Criminals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the special unit set up at Scotland Yard to hunt for suspected Nazi war criminals living in Britain will be disbanded when funding ceases at the end of March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The future of the Unit is a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Fines

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the total number of warrants issued for the non-payment of fines which were issued for the first time by *(a)* the Central Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, *(b)* the Central Gateshead magistrates court in 1994, *(c)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993 and *(d)* the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994; and what is the total number of warrants for arrest for non-payment of fines issued for the second and subsequent time by (i) the Central Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, (ii) the Central Gateshead magistrates court in 1994, (iii) the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993 and (iv) the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994;

(2) if he will list *(a)* the total numbers of fines issued by (i) the Central Gateshead magistrates court in 1993, (ii) the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1993, (iii) the Central Gateshead magistrates court in 1994 and (iv) the Central Newcastle magistrates court in 1994, *(b)* the total amounts of fines issued for those periods and by those courts, *(c)* the total numbers of fines remaining unpaid in those periods and to those courts and *(d)* the total amount of fines remaining unpaid in those periods and to those courts.

Mr. Maclean: The detailed information requested is not collected centrally but inquiries have been made of the two courts and information is given in the table.

Fines[1] data for Gateshead and Newcastle magistrates courts 1993 and 1994

	Gateshead		*Newcastle*	
	1993	*1994*	*1993*	*1994*
Number of warrants issued	5,714	7,632	23,143	17,592
Number of distress warrants issued	3,420	4,256	13,915	12,716
Number of fines imposed	10,616	10,556	21,758	19,699
Amount of fines imposed	£1,175,145	£1,301,044	£2,122,020	£1,955,879
Number of fines unpaid[2] at end of year	14,211	11,274	14,949	14,581
Amount of fines unpaid[2] at end of year	£1,055,528	£1,057,376	£1,141,760	£1,283,425

[1] 'Fines' includes fines, compensation, fixed penalties and costs.
[2] Unpaid fines may include those where there is 'time to pay'.
Source:
Gateshead and Newcastle magistrates courts.

Nationality Applications

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for British nationality are currently outstanding for *(a)* more than one year, *(b)* more than two years and *(c)* more than three years; what is the current average length of time taken to process applications; and what were the figures over the previous (i) 12 months, (ii) 24 months, (iii) 36 months and (iv) 48 months.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As at 31 December 1994, the number of applications for British nationality outstanding for more than one year was 9,630 broken down as follows:

	Number
more than one year (but less than two years)	7,717
more than two years (but less than three years)	1,428
more than three years	485

Comparable figures for 1990–1993 are not available. Average waiting times, in months, are shown in the following table:

	Naturalisations	*Registrations*	*All*
December 1994	13	7	12
December 1993	16	12	15
December 1992	22	15	20
December 1991	30	18	26
December 1990	35	22	31

Hong Kong Citizens

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Hong Kong citizens were granted entry into the United Kingdom *(a)* temporarily and *(b)* permanently in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1993; and how many Hong Kong citizens he estimates will be granted permanent residence rights in the United Kingdom before 1997.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information on British dependent territories citizens and British nationals (overseas) from Hong Kong given leave to enter the United Kingdom is given in the table. The numbers of such persons accepted for settlement—that is, allowed to stay indefinitely—were 1,590 in 1992 and 1,520 in 1993. No estimates have been made of the corresponding numbers up to 1997.

Admissions to the United Kingdom of BDTCs and BN(O)s from Hong Kong

Admission category	*1992*	*1993*
Spouses, fiance(e)s, children, parents, grandparents[1]	380	190
Other categories[2]	91,400	90,400
	91,800	90,600

[1] Seeking, or accepted for, settlement in the United Kingdom.
[2] Some of whom subsequently become eligible to apply for settlement.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently being held in detention in police stations in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* South Yorkshire, *(c)* West Yorkshire and *(d)* Humberside broken down by (i) police station and (ii) nationality of asylum seeker; how many are being held in total in those areas, broken down by nationality; and what were the figures as at 15 January for each year since 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As at 12 January 1995, no persons who had sought asylum were being held in police cells in North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire or Humberside. However, five persons who had sought asylum are being detained at Her Majesty's prison, Armley, West Yorkshire consisting of two Indians and one Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese; another one Pakistani was being detained at HMP The Wolds in Humberside. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following refusal of the application, as well as those whose application was under consideration or subject to appeal.

Information on the number of persons who had sought asylum and were detained in these areas on 15 January, in 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 is not available.

Calf Exports

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many protestors have been arrested to date at Shoreham in connection with calf exports; and how many have been charged;

(2) what police forces have been involved in policing the current series of protests at Shoreham;

(3) what has been the average number of police officers on duty each night during the current campaign against the export of veal calves at Shoreham;

(4) who took the decision for police officers to wear full riot gear at Shoreham; and what were the reasons stated.

Mr. Maclean: Up to 11 January, 76 people were arrested, of whom 66 have been charged. Sussex police have been aided by the following forces in policing the disturbances at Shoreham; City of London police, Essex police, Hampshire constabulary, Kent county constabulary, the Metropolitan police, Surrey constabulary and Thames Valley police. Since 4 January about 1,000 officers have been deployed on each occasion that lorries carrying calves have driven to the harbour. The decision to deploy officers with public order protective equipment was taken by the chief constable of Sussex on operational grounds.

Immigration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people detained at the behest of the immigration service last year spent more than *(a)* 24 hours and *(b)* 48 hours in a police cell; and what was the longest continuous period spent by an individual detainee.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Seamen

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what resources he has allocated for the enforcement of regulations governing the contract employment of seamen on vessels normally plying between two or more United Kingdom ports; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give details of all breaches of the regulations relating to the employment of contract seafarers plying between United Kingdom ports in the last three years.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure that regulations relating to the contract employment of seamen on vessels plying between two or more United Kingdom ports and normally not leaving the United Kingdom waters are properly enforced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I have been asked to reply to the third question as well.

Administration of the regulations relating to the employment of contract seamen on board ships plying between United Kingdom ports is a matter for the Department of Employment. However, there is power in the Immigration Act 1971 to enforce the removal of those seamen under contract to join vessels in the United Kingdom who fail to comply with the conditions on which they were given leave to enter or who are reasonably suspected of intending to do so. The immigration service has dealt with 49 seamen under these powers in the past three years.

Specific resources are not allocated by the immigration service to the enforcement of the immigration laws relating to contract seamen.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to discuss with European parties the extension of immigration regulations relating to contract seamen on board vessels plying between two or more member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: None; we have no plans to alter our policy, which is not to require work permits for crews serving on ships on international voyages, including voyages to other member states of the European Union, where the crews are not living in the United Kingdom.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the inter-departmental group on domestic violence will next meet; and what policy decisions arose from the last meeting.

Mr. Maclean: At its last meeting, the ministerial group on domestic violence endorsed proposals in respect of a public awareness campaign on domestic violence, and the preparation of an inter-agency circular to encourage local

statutory and voluntary agencies to co-ordinate responses to domestic violence. It also decided that the issue of a centrally co-ordinated policy on refuge provision would be considered further at its next meeting, a date for which will be settled shortly.

Young Offenders Report

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his report on young people and crime following the recent survey of youth lifestyles and self-report offending.

Mr. Maclean: Neither I nor my ministerial colleagues have yet had an opportunity to consider this report, which is still in preparation, but nearing completion. I expect the report to be published later in the year, once it has been finalised and arrangements for its publication agreed.

Voting

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many British citizens living overseas are registered for voting in each constituency in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on overseas electors is published in table 1.4 of "Electoral Statistics 1994" published by HMSO—series EL No 21—a copy of which is in the Library.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the plans of his Department to make information available on Internet and the documents which he intends to be made available on Internet over the next year which will be accessible via the worldwide web server "open.gov.UK" or any specific departmental server.

Mr. Howard: We are considering using the Internet to provide access to information, including in particular published statistics. The option of making this information accessible via the worldwide server "open.gov.UK" will be assessed. Home Office press notices are already available via the Internet from a number of commercial information providers.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Howard: I appreciate that there are great benefits to be derived from the use of electronic mail and its associated technologies. Electronic mail is already used extensively within my Department and its use for communications outside my Department is under review.

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Howard: Many of my Department's telephone systems have been converted to cope with the national code change without cost to the Department. For others a charge has been incurred, amounting to about £200,000 across about 300 sites, including executive agencies. Changes to stationery and published material have been incorporated at negligible cost.

Stolen Vehicles

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) to what factors he attributes the fall in stolen vehicle recovery rates between 1992 and 1993;

(2) what information is currently available for the number of stolen vehicles and the recovery rate in 1994; and when the full calendar year figures will be available;

(3) what recovery rate has been achieved in each police authority area for stolen vehicles in 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not yet available for 1994. The next statistics to be published will be for the calendar year 1994 and will be available in the spring of 1995. Figures for 1992 and 1993 are published in table 2.14 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales". It is not possible to attribute the fall in stolen vehicle recovery rates between 1992 and 1993 to any particular factor.

Ethnic Minorities, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce his decisions on applications by local authorities for financial assistance under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 as soon as possible, possibly on a phased basis; when he intends to announce his decision on applications submitted by Bradford council; what representations he has received from local authorities and others for decisions to be announced as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Well over 800 project applications have been received. The deadline for applications was deferred to 30 December to take account of my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement that the funding available was being doubled. Nevertheless, we hope that it will still be possible to make the outcome known to all applicants in accordance with our original target of the end of February. As available funds have been oversubscribed, decisions could not be taken and announced on a phased basis without prejudicing the position of other bids.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Howard: Of the 366 individuals appointed or reappointed to public positions in the Home Office in the last year, 55 were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many speed cameras have been in operation each year since their inception; how many

speeding charges have been made annually as a result of their evidence and what percentage of all speeding charges annually have been made on the basis of evidence from speed cameras, in each police authority.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the number of speed cameras in operation is not available centrally in the form requested. However, a survey by the Department of Transport in early 1994 stated that 27 speed cameras were in use in England and Wales at the end of 1993.

Information available to me shows that 290 speeding prosecutions were brought in England and Wales in 1992 following evidence produced by automatic cameras and 6,390 in 1993. In addition, 25,767 fixed penalties notices were issued in 1993. Figures for 1994 are not yet available.

The following table shows the proportion of fixed penalty notices and prosecutions resulting from evidence from speed cameras.

Fixed penalties and prosecutions for speeding offences detected by automatic cameras

England and Wales — *Number of offences*

Police force	*Fixed penalties*				*Prosecutions*			
	Camera offences		*As a percentage of all offences*		*Camera offences*		*As a percentage of all offences*	
	1992	*1993*	*1992*	*1993*	*1992*	*1993*	*1992*	*1993*
Avon and Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	71	—	2
Devon and Cornwall	—	9,241	—	66	6	910	—	40
Dorset	—	1,129	—	11	—	—	—	—
Essex	—	—	—	—	—	659	—	8
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	1	95	—	4
Metropolitan	—	3,804	—	9	283	3,225	2	24
Northumbria	—	—	—	—	—	218	—	9
South Yorkshire	—	46	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thames Valley	—	11,547	—	54	—	1,196	—	30
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	16	—	2
Total	—	25,767	—	7	290	6,390	—	6

Police (Electric Shields and Batons)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what authorisation he has given for *(a)* the testing and *(b)* the use of electric shields or electric batons by the police.

Mr. Maclean: None. Chief officers are responsible for deciding what equipment to obtain, and except for the Metropolitan police, where my right hon. and learned Friend is police authority, do not require his authorisation. No chief officer possesses or, so far as the Home Office is aware, is considering the introduction of such equipment for use against people. My right hon. and learned Friend would certainly expect to be consulted about any such proposal. I understand that some chief officers have obtained electric shock equipment to protect officers against ferocious dogs in pre-planned operations.

Police

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have left the service in each of the past 15 years because of *(a)* retirement, *(b)* sickness and *(c)* other reasons.

Mr. Maclean: Detailed information is not available in the form requested. The available data on wastage for the years 1979 to 1989 are contained in the annual reports of HM chief inspector of constabulary. I shall write to the hon. Member with information for the years 1990 to 1993.

Policing, Caerphilly

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future policing arrangements for the new unitary district of Caerphilly.

Mr. Howard: I have consulted the forces, police authorities and local authorities in the area on the future policing arrangements for the new unitary district of Caerphilly. I also asked Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary to report on this issue.

In the light of the replies received and of the professional views of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, I have decided that the Gwent constabulary shall be responsible for policing the whole of the new district from 1 April 1996.

An order will be made in due course, under section 21A of the Police Act 1964—as inserted by section 14 of the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994—to give effect to this decision, following discussions with the police authorities and forces concerned on the details of its content.

Disclosure Requirements

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the prosecution are to be required to provide the defence with advance copies of witnesses' statements in summary only proceedings.

Mr. Maclean: I am considering the issues raised by the current disclosure requirements generally, and will take this point into account as part of that consideration.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the costs to the Child Support Agency of employing bailiffs for each of the last two years.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter From Ann Chant to Ms Dawn Primarolo, dated 16 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the costs to the Child Support Agency of employing bailiffs.

In accordance with the contract awarded in January 1994, bailiff services are provided at no administrative cost to the Agency.

Strathclyde Flooding

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the most up to date figures in relation to Benefits Agency activity in each parliamentary constituency affected by the floods in Strathclyde during December 1994 for *(a)* the number of claims for community care grants, *(b)* the numbers accepted and paid as per claim, *(c)* the value of grants claimed expressed as (i) a total and (ii) an average, *(d)* value of grants paid expressed as (i) a total and (ii) an average, *(e)* the numbers of claims for crisis loans, *(f)* the numbers accepted and paid as per claim, *(g)* the value of applications claimed expressed as (i) a total and (ii) an average, *(h)* the numbers of claims for community care grants refused expressed as (i) a total and (ii) a percentage, (i) the number of claims for crisis loans refused expressed as (i) a total and (ii) a percentage, *(j)* the number of community care grants reduced from claim as (i) a total and (ii) a percentage and *(k)* the number of crisis loans reduced from claim as (i) a total and (ii) a percentage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 16 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Community Care Grant (CCG) and Crisis Loan (CL) applications received by the Benefits Agency (BA) from people affected by the recent flooding in the Strathclyde area.

BA District boundaries do not correspond with county or local authority boundaries and information relating to Strathclyde has, therefore, been provided for the five BA Districts serving Strathclyde; Renfrew, Glasgow South West, Glasgow Laurieston, Springburn and Cumbernauld, and Glasgow East.

Information relating to the amounts requested and the number of awards made which did not meet the full amounts requested can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. This is because this information could only be obtained by examining every application made by the flood victims. However, the Districts keep simple separate records relating to applications by the flood victims in respect of the amount paid and category of application. I have, therefore, provided at Annex A and Annex B information on the total number of CCG and CL applications received, the number and amounts awarded and the numbers refused for each District as at 12 January 1995, the latest information available.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Community care grant applications made by Strathclyde flood victims as at 12 January 1995

District	*Number of applications received*	*Number awarded*	*Percentage award*	*Amount awarded (£)*	*Average award (£)*	*Number refused*	*Percentage refused*
Renfrew	421	400	95.0	70,340	175.85	21	5.0
Glasgow South-west	14	14	100.0	17,712	1,265.14	n/a	n/a
Glasgow Laurieston	4	4	100.0	1,978	494.50	n/a	n/a
Glasgow East	1	1	100.0	520	520.00	n/a	n/a
Springburn and Cumbernauld	4	2	50.0	2,139	1,069.50	2	50.0
Totals	444	421	—	92,689	—	21	—

Crisis loan applications made by Strathclyde flood victims as at 12 January 1995

District	*Number of applications received*	*Number awarded*	*Percentage awarded*	*Amount awarded (£)*	*Average award (£)*	*Number refused*	*Percentage refused*
Renfrew	102	94	92.2	10,868.00	115.62	8	7.8
Glasgow South west	2	2	100.00	1,760.00	880.00	n/a	n/a
Glasgow Laurieston	3	3	100.00	221.24	73.75	n/a	n/a
Glasgow East	1	1	100.00	1,000.00	1,000.00	n/a	n/a
Springburn and Cumbernauld	1	1	100.00	69.00	69.00	n/a	n/a
Totals	109	101	—	13,918.24	—	8	—

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost of processing a claim for disability living allowance when it goes to appeal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 16 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the average cost of processing a claim for Disability Living Allowance when it goes to appeal.

Information regarding the overall cost is not available in the exact format required.

Benefits Agency (BA) staff are responsible for preparing an appeal which is then submitted to the Independent Tribunal Service

(ITS). The papers are returned to the BA once the appeal decision has been given. The estimated cost to the BA of preparing an appeal for submission to the ITS is £10.93 per case. This figure does not include the cost to the ITS in hearing the appeal.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Hague: There were four such appointees in the year ended 31 December 1994.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost of unemployment benefit and income support for a couple with two children of school age, where there is no other income apart from child benefit, and no capital resources available to them at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Benefit in payment	*Average amount* £
Unemployment Benefit and Income Support	112.29
Income Support only	115.46
Overall Average	115.04

Notes:
1. School-age children have been assumed to be those between five and 16 years of age. There may be other children included in the benefit unit.
2. Amounts are rounded to the nearest penny and include any Unemployment Benefit paid to the partner in his/her own right.
3. Amounts are derived from the Income Support Statistical Enquiry, February 1994.

Young Carers

Mrs. Golding: To aks the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent research his Department has done into the number of children acting as carers for adults or other children; and what plans there are to do so in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

We are currently testing questions in the Office of Population Census and Surveys omnibus survey, to see whether reliable information may be gathered on young carers.

TREASURY

Royal Properties (Tax)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the difference in the tax arrangements in respect of the treatment of *(a)* Buckingham palace, *(b)* Windsor castle, *(c)* Sandringham and *(d)* Balmoral.

Mr. Nelson: Buckingham palace and Windsor castle are treated as being occupied by the Crown. Both properties comprise domestic and non-domestic accommodation. The domestic accommodation is valued for council tax. Because the Crown is exempt from rating, a contribution in lieu of rates is paid in respect of the non-domestic accommodation.

Sandringham house and Balmoral castle are occupied by Her Majesty in person. In each case, the property is valued for council tax.

Public Limited Companies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to penalise public limited companies which fail to pay their bills promptly.

Mr. Aitken: It is for individual suppliers rather than Government to seek redress from business customers who fail to honour agreed credit terms. There are therefore no plans to introduce any system of penalties. The Government announced a package of measures, in the White Paper on competitiveness in May 1994, to address late payment. One of the measures is the implementation of proposals to require public companies to state their payment policies in the directors' reports.

VAT (Charities)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* organisations outside the House, during the past 12 months relating to making exempt from VAT repairs to public buildings owned or run by charitable organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have received a small number of representations for repair and maintenance to charity buildings to be exempt from VAT. Such an exemption would not be permissible under the EC sixth VAT directive.

Amusement Machines

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he has had with the British Amusement and Catering Trades Association with regard to the proposed amusement machine licence duty; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As announced in the Budget, implementation of this new duty will not take place until November 1995. This will allow Customs and Excise to consult with the trade on the scope and coverage of amusement machine licence duty. I am aware that BACTA is collating information from its members and will be making representations to me in a meeting on 23 January.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the duty on amusement machines is to be imposed on the basis of the number of players per machine; and how he expects the imposition of duty to affect employment prospects within the industry at all levels.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The proposals contained in the Finance Bill for the duty on amusement machines provide that the number of chargeable machines equates to the number of simultaneous playing positions. This mirrors the existing provisions for gaming machines. I am meeting representatives of the industry on 23 January and will give careful consideration to any representations they make about employment prospects as a result of the introduction of this new duty.

Blind Persons' Tax Allowances

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have taken place in the blind persons' tax allowances in each year since 1989; what was the cost thereof; and if he will make a statement on his decision in the November 1994 Budget.

Sir George Young: The blind person's allowance is not subject to statutory annual indexation. However, it was doubled in 1990–91 from £540 to £1,080 and further increased to £1,200 in 1994–95. At 1995–96 income levels, the cost of the allowance is expected to be about £3 million greater than if the allowance were available only at its 1989–90 level of £540. Between 1989–90 and 1995–96, the allowance has increased by almost 70 per cent. in real terms.

Investor's Losses

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation has been paid out directly by insurance companies regulated by the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation to investors who have suffered losses in respect of life and pensions business as a result of bad advice and fraud in each year since 1988.

Mr. Nelson: I regret that this information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In the first instance, investors' complaints go directly to the life office involved. Where agreement is reached at this stage, firms are not required to publish details. If agreement cannot be reached, the Insurance Ombudsman Bureau can intervene. The ombudsman does not publish a breakdown of awards made to investors in the form requested.

Value Added Tax (Transport) Order

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that the hon. Member for Wellingborough receives a written reply to the questions he asked the Paymaster General during the debate on the Value Added Tax (Transport) Order on 11 January concerning the Confederation of Passenger Transport's query on exclusive tours and the effect of the sixth VAT directive M/388 EEC on the implementation of the order.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall be writing to him in reply to the questions that he asked.

Finance Bill

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect of the Government's proposals in clause 140 of the Finance Bill 1995 on *(a)* the public expenditure new control total and *(b)* the total tax revenue in (i) 1993–94, (ii) 1994–95 and (iii) 1995–96.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Clause 140 will put right a defect in existing law and does not represent any change in existing practice. The recent "Financial Statement and Budget Report" does not show it as having any effect.

Private Medical Insurance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions the Treasury has had with *(a)* the Department of Health and *(b)* representatives of the private medical insurance providers, regarding extending tax relief to all people with private medical insurance.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The Treasury receives representations from, and has discussions with, a wide range of organisations with regard to taxation issues. These have included both the Department of Health and representatives of private medical insurance providers.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the principal reasons for the reduction in forecast receipts from the insurance premium tax in 1994–95 and 1995–96 contained in table 4A.1 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96" compared with the equivalent figures in table 4.1 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1994–95".

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Revision to the forecast for insurance premium tax for 1994–95 reflects the decision made after the publication of the 1994 FSBR to change from monthly to quarterly tax returns. This is expected to delay some receipts from 1994–95 into 1995–96. The revision to receipts for 1995–96 is well within likely forecasting error, but reflects a revised view of the likely trend of lower premiums.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the insurance industry in response to the consultations he announced on 29 November 1994 on his proposals to extend the powers of Customs and Excise in connection with the collection of insurance premium tax.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Representations were received from the Association of British Insurers, which represents insurance companies that will account for the vast majority of insurance premium tax. Representations concerned the implementation and application of the tax and they have been taken into account in drafting legislation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cable Franchises

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the initial cash bid received from each cable franchisee awarded a cable franchise under the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The initial cash bids for the West Kent and the Blackpool and Fylde franchises were £1,600,210.75 and £762,000 respectively.

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cable franchises have been awarded under the Broadcasting Act 1990 in each year since the Act became law.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Two local delivery franchises have been awarded since the Broadcasting Act became law. Both were awarded during 1994, the first for the West Kent franchise, awarded on 19 May, and the second for the Blackpool and Fylde franchise, on 15 September.

Mr. Timms: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much revenue has been derived from cable franchisees in *(a)* application fees and *(b)* tender payments in each year since the enactment of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The application fee for the two franchises which have so far been awarded was £15,000 each. No tender payments have yet been made.

Development Initiatives, Northern Region

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what economic development initiatives his Department has undertaken in the northern region in 1994; and what initiatives are planned for 1995.

Mr. Ian Taylor: In 1994, Government offices began to implement the measures contained in the competitiveness White Paper in consultation with the northern regional business community. In addition, my Department's programmes of assistance continue to operate in the region—for example, regional selective assistance in assisted areas—and a range of economic development projects will be funded through the single regeneration budget. For 1995, the focus will again be on the competitiveness White Paper and establishing full regional business link coverage by the middle of the year. A significant proportion of the region will also benefit from European structural funds as well as the continuation of the full range of other programmes.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Heseltine: The preferred carrier for any particular civil servant's travel will depend on the circumstances of the journey concerned and value for money. My Department has non-exclusive arrangements with British Airways, British Midland Airways, Virgin Atlantic Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, Sabena Belgian Airlines, Air UK, Manx Airlines (Europe), Teeside Aviation and Air France.

Prison Labour

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action is being taken to control the import of raw materials produced by prisoners or those kept in similar conditions.

Mr. Needham: With limited exceptions, the importation into the United Kingdom of any goods produced in any foreign prison or like establishment is banned by the Foreign Prison Made Goods Act 1897, as amended in 1988. Enforcement is a matter for HM Customs and Excise, which is dependent on receiving sufficient evidence, specific to the consignment concerned, of prison-made origin.

Inward Investment, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role his Department has played in assisting inward investment by Taiwanese manufacturing companies in Northumberland.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department has provided regional selective assistance grants to the following projects:

(i) £8.25 million to Europa Magnetics Corporation of Cramlington to create 550 new jobs manufacturing floppy disks;

(ii) £250,000 to Synpac Chemicals Ltd. of Bedlington to create 57 jobs manufacturing chemicals; and

(iii) £90,000 to Lite-On Ltd. of Ashington to create 85 jobs manufacturing customised power supply components for electrical and electronic equipment.

In addition, my Department is working closely with the Northern Development Co., the local authorities, Northumberland training and enterprise council and others to provide a full aftercare service to all inward investors in the county, including those of Taiwanese origin.

Bankruptcies

Mr. Deva: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of companies which are founded in the United kingdom go bankrupt within two years.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is not available.

Professional Football

Ms Hoey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will consider setting up an inquiry into the trading and competition practices within professional football.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Under competition legislation, responsibility for considering and, if appropriate, investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour lies with the Director General of Fair Trading in the first instance. If the hon. Member has any evidence of business practices within professional football which may merit investigation under competition legislation, she should pass the evidence to him.

Biotechnology

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spent supporting academic research into the applications of biotechnology in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion of the total public research and development budget this represents.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

Some £102 million was spent supporting academic research into biotechnology by the research councils in 1992–93. This was 1.9 per cent. of the total public civil and defence research and development budget.

EDUCATION

Higher Education Students

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total number of full-time students in higher education in each of the last five years.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is shown in the table:

Full-time higher education student enrolments (all domiciles) in England—1989 to 1993

Year	Number
1993–94	[1]839,000
1992–93	763,000
1991–92	671,000
1990–91	593,000
1989–90	544,000

Source:
USR, DFE (FESR).
[1] Provisional.

Nursery School Places, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many nursery school places are currently available in Northumberland.

Mr. Forth: Information on the number of nursery school places is not collected centrally. The number of pupils being taught in maintained nursery schools in Northumberland local education authority in January 1994 was 128.

Primary Schools, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give the total number of pupils on school rolls and the pupil-to-teacher ratio in primary schools in Northumberland for each year since 1988 to 1994.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table.

Pupils and pupil: teacher ratios in maintained primary schools in Northumberland LEA 1988–94

Position in January each year	Pupils (FTEs[1])	Pupil:teacher ratio[2]
1988	19,382	22.8
1989	19,168	22.5
1990	19,505	23.0
1991	19,468	23.5
1992	19,710	23.2
1993	20,131	23.8
1994	20,243	24.3

[1] Counting each part-time pupil as 0.5 full-time equivalent.
[2] Including the full-time equivalent of part-time teachers.

Free School Meals

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils in the Northumberland education authority from families currently on income support or the family credit scheme will be entitled to free school meals.

Mr. Robin Squire: Only income support entitles pupils to a free school meal, although there is cash assistance within family credit. On census day in January 1994, the number of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal in maintained schools in Northumberland education authority was 7,950—15.4 per cent. of day pupils.

Grants for Education Support and Training

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what amount of GEST funds was available at the original introduction of the national curriculum; and what amount is available to local education authorities now;

(2) if she will list the amount of GEST funds allocated to each education authority at the original introduction of the national curriculum and for each subsequent year.

Mr. Forth: The GEST programme in 1988–89, when the national curriculum was introduced, supported LEA expenditure of £322.5 million, of which £9 million was for activities related to the national curriculum. In 1995–96, the GEST programme will support LEA expenditure of £251 million, of which £40.1 million will be for national curriculum related activities. The Department pays grant on this expenditure at the rate of 60 per cent. in most cases.

This information sought for each education authority for each year since 1988–89 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

General National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list by individual school and further education college in England the total budget allocated to each participating institution to fund GNVQs in each year since 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This information is not available to the Department. The great majority of the funding allocated to schools and colleges by local education authorities, the Further Education Funding Council and the Funding Agency for Schools is unhypothecated and total funds for the support of GNVQs are not therefore identified separately.

As part of the GNVQ part 1 pilot scheme announced by the Minister of State on 21 December, 118 schools will receive specific support for part 1 GNVQ in 1995–96 under the Government's GEST programme or through other special grants. A table concerning the allocations made for individual schools has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what resources were specifically allocated in order to fund general national vocational qualifications in schools and further education colleges in England in each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Under the Government's specific grant programmes, the following allocations have been made for vocational qualifications since 1990–91. Since 1992–93, these have focused on GNVQ support in schools, following the introduction of GNVQs in September 1992.

Year	£ million
1990–91	2.0
1991–92	2.1
1992–93	3.0
1993–94	5.5
1994–95	5.2
1995–96	13.3

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between her departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Forth: In the case of the Department's one next steps agency, the Teachers' Pensions Agency, the respective responsibilities of the Secretary of State and the chief executive are set out in the agency's framework document of 1 April 1992, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Residential Care Pupils

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils in residential care are excluded from local authority schools in *(a)* Kirklees, *(b)* in all Yorkshire council areas and *(c)* nationally.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available centrally.

State Nursery Schools, Leeds

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of *(a)* three-year-olds and *(b)* four-year-olds were attending state nursery schools in Leeds in each year since 1985.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage of pupils aged 3 and 4[1] in maintained nursery schools in Leeds LEA 1985–94

Ages at previous 31 August	Pupils aged 3	Pupils aged 4
1985	2	[2]—
1986	2	1
1987	2	1
1988	2	[2]—
1989	2	[2]—
1990	2	1
1991	2	1
1992	2	1
1993	1	1
1994	1	[2]—

[1] Excluding pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January.
[2] Less than 0.5.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment her Department has made of the differential growth rates across colleges of further education; what measures she has taken or intends to take in order to reform the method of funding further education colleges in England; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Funding Council has developed a new funding methodology after wide consultation; its proposals gained a high degree of acceptance. The new methodology was introduced for the academic year 1994–95. Refinements to the methodology, and examination of information about the sector to assess the sufficiency and adequacy of further education provision, are matters for the council.

Student Loans

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students are eligible to apply for student loans; and how many receive mandatory grants.

Mr. Boswell: In 1993–94, there was estimated to be around 752,000 students who were eligible to apply for a student loan in England and Wales, compared with a figure of around 688,000 in 1992–93. In 1992–93, the latest year for which information is available, there were 666,100 mandatory award holders in England and Wales. The coverage and conditions of eligibility for student loans differ from those for mandatory awards.

Pre-school Provision

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many three and four-year-olds there are in nursery classes, nursery schools or primary reception classes for each local education authority; and what percentage this represents of the population in those age groups in January 1994.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information about the number of pupils under five years of age being taught in maintained nursery and primary schools in each local education authority in England in January 1994 is shown in the table.

Pupils under five in maintained nursery and primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of Population
Camden	1,979	49
Greenwich	4,267	62
Hackney	3,170	52
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,179	58
Islington	3,261	69
Kensington and Chelsea	1,264	38
Lambeth	3,457	49
Lewisham	3,763	52
Southwark	5,167	73
Tower Hamlets	4,897	84
Wandsworth	4,089	62
Westminster	1,671	44
Barking and Dagenham	3,340	74
Barnet	4,751	57
Bexley	2,475	40
Brent	4,662	68
Bromley	2,491	33
Croydon	4,376	47
Ealing	5,816	73
Enfield	3,999	54
Haringey	4,394	76
Harrow	2,633	50
Havering	2,435	43
Hillingdon	3,278	48
Hounslow	4,189	72
Kingston upon Thames	2,172	61
Merton	3,683	75
Newham	4,563	58
Redbridge	2,443	40
Richmond upon Thames	1,887	44
Sutton	1,885	40
Waltham Forest	3,635	54
Birmingham	20,363	66
Coventry	5,097	58
Dudley	5,636	69
Sandwell	7,509	90
Solihull	3,707	71
Walsall	6,808	92
Wolverhampton	6,012	85
Knowsley	4,334	88
Liverpool	10,904	87
St Helens	3,210	68
Sefton	4,967	64
Wirral	5,188	57
Bolton	5,632	72

Pupils under five in maintained nursery and primary schools in each LEA in England January 1994

LEA	Pupils[1]	Percentage of Population
Bury	3,165	61
Manchester	9,875	73
Oldham	4,653	70
Rochdale	4,133	64
Salford	5,541	88
Stockport	4,363	57
Tameside	4,731	73
Trafford	3,942	69
Wigan	4,971	57
Barnsley	3,959	66
Doncaster	6,187	74
Rotherham	4,337	60
Sheffield	8,230	63
Bradford	10,243	70
Calderdale	3,637	68
Kirklees	7,732	72
Leeds	14,534	75
Wakefield	6,438	72
Gateshead	3,456	68
Newcastle upon Tyne	5,039	72
North Tyneside	4,195	87
South Tyneside	3,555	86
Sunderland	6,024	74
Avon	13,259	53
Bedfordshire	8,115	49
Berkshire	7,077	33
Buckinghamshire	5,906	32
Cambridgeshire	8,078	43
Cheshire	13,995	53
Cleveland	14,481	90
Cornwall	5,242	45
Cumbria	6,954	56
Derbyshire	15,235	60
Devon	6,946	27
Dorset	5,655	37
Durham	12,050	77
East Sussex	6,772	39
Essex	9,208	22
Gloucestershire	4,467	32
Hampshire	15,098	36
Hereford and Worcester	4,044	22
Hertfordshire	13,880	50
Humberside	14,567	62
Isle of Wight	1,087	39
Kent	15,102	36
Lancashire	20,212	53
Leicestershire	9,922	38
Lincolnshire	6,205	43
Norfolk	6,254	34
North Yorkshire	8,861	49
Northamptonshire	8,471	50
Northumberland	5,405	71
Nottinghamshire	15,688	57
Oxfordshire	4,033	25
Shropshire	4,026	36
Somerset	4,466	37
Staffordshire	15,928	56
Suffolk	5,595	32
Surrey	7,622	29
Warwickshire	6,344	49
West Sussex	3,901	22
Wiltshire	3,829	24
England[2 3]	674,596	52

[1] Excludes pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January 1994

[2] Includes the Isles of Scilly

[3] Includes the Corporation of London

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many of the individuals appointed by her Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Boswell: In the past year, six individuals appointed by the Department to public bodies had been first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Adult Literacy

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if the Government have concluded their review of the adult literacy and basic skills unit; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The Government have concluded their review of the adult literacy and basic skills unit. I am writing today to the chairman of ALBSU, Mr. Peter Davis, to inform him of our conclusions.

The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are fundamental to the United Kingdom's future competitiveness. Too many people have inadequate basic skills for the modern world. ALBSU plays an important role in tackling that problem.

Earlier this year, ALBSU published proposals in its document "Making it Happen" that it should be redesignated as a general basic skills unit with a wider remit. ALBSU argued that this would allow the unit to develop a more coherent national basic skills strategy and tackle the problem of poor basic skills more effectively.

In the light of ALBSU's proposals, and of the Government's review of the unit's effectiveness and efficiency, the Government have decided that ALBSU should remain as an independent basic skills unit funded by the Department for Education and the Welsh Office, but working closely with the further education funding councils and the Further Education Development Agency.

We have also decided that ALBSU's remit should be extended so that it becomes a more general basic skills unit, with responsibilities extending to basic skills training in the workplace, for the unemployed, for young people and between generations.

These decisions represent a vote of confidence in ALBSU. They also demonstrate the Government's commitment to improving the basic skills of the whole population, as part of our broader commitment to achieving the national targets for education and training.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public

positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

The Prime Minister: Recommendations for appointments are made from a number of sources. It is not practicable for my Office to detail those first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Strathclyde Floods

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to visit the victims of the Strathclyde floods.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer Monday 16 January 1995]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Local Government for Scotland visited the victims of the flooding, on my behalf, on 12 December 1994 and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland made a private visit on 27 December 1994.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Attorney-General how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

The Attorney-General: No such appointments have been made in the last year.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between the next steps agencies and Ministers.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The division of responsibilities and the relationship between the chief executive of an agency and the Minister in charge of the Department is set out in the individual agency's framework document. A copy of the framework document for each of the 102 agencies now in existence is available in the Library of the House.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The division of responsibilities and relationship between Ministers and agencies in my Department is set out in the framework document of each agency. Copies of these framework documents, a number of which are undergoing review at present, are in the Library of the House.

Executive Agencies

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, if he will set out the principal division of the annual budgets of each of the next steps agencies for each year since their formation.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Information on the budgets of each of the next steps agencies can be found in their published annual accounts, which are in the Library of the House.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out for each of the next steps agencies, whether they have acquired their own headquarters buildings and, if so, at what purchase cost or annual rental; how many support staff they have required which were not required when their operations were within their parent Government Department; how many of them publish periodical journals and at what annual cost; how many have fleets of executive cars or single executive cars and at what annual cost; how many have specially designed logos and at what cost; how many have corporate clothing and at what cost; and what is the cost of specially designed and printed corporate stationery.

Mr. David Hunt: These are matters for individual departmental Ministers and their agency chief executives.

Agencies operate within the framework of demanding quality standards and tight control of civil service running costs and other financial targets, as set out in the White Paper "The Civil Service—Continuity and Change", Cm 2627. In the usual way, their expenditure is subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General. As tasks are delegated to agencies, staff in departmental headquarters previously performing the task are reduced. Staff in agencies remain, of course, civil servants—total civil service manpower has reduced at the same time as more next steps agencies have been established. The record of agencies in improving effectiveness and efficiency in government is summarised in the "Next Steps Review 1994", Cm 2750.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: One.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Subsidiarity

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the instances since the treaty of Maastricht when the principle of subsidiarity has been applied to Community decisions.

Mr. David Davis: The principle of subsidiarity applies to all Community decisions. Article 3b of the Maastricht treaty makes this clear, as do the conclusions of successive European Councils since Lisbon in June 1992, and the October 1993 inter-institutional agreement.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the instances when Her Majesty's Government have sought to have the principle of subsidiarity applied since the ratification of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. David Davis: We examine closely the subsidiarity implications of all Community decisions, and have done so since long before the Maastricht treaty entered into

force. The incorporation of subsidiarity into article 3b of the treaty and the undertakings by the Council, Commission and the European Parliament in the 1993 inter-institutional agreement to ensure that subsidiarity checks form an integral part of their internal procedures have helped to entrench subidiarity further into all Community business.

Caribbean

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to encourage incremental constitutional development suited to the needs of each territory in the dependent territories in the Caribbean.

Mr. Baldry: Our policy is to consider constitutional development in the light of the needs of individual dependent territories and ourselves, but such development is subject always to the good government of the territories concerned.

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of an increase in the allocation of financial resources to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our policy is to seek to restrict the annual increase of the budgets of international organisations to zero real growth. In the case of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, we distinguish between administrative and operational expenditure. Administrative expenditure should be subject to ZRG. Operational expenditure is more difficult to foresee and requires more flexible treatment, although it, too, must be cost-effective.

Since the end of the cold war, the OSCE has increased its activities in conflict prevention and crisis management. These include OSCE missions presently operating in eight OSCE countries and an expansion of the preventive diplomacy work by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. We fully support these activities.

The United Kingdom delegation to the OSCE plays an active role in the negotiation of the OSCE's annual budget and ensuring value for money.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Goodlad: The number of individuals appointed in the last year by this Department who were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit are as follows:

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
None
Overseas Development Administration
One (1)

Iran

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compatibility of FCO sponsorship of a seminar organised by the Society for Contemporary Iranian Studies on the political economy of contemporary Iran at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, on 18 and 19 January with present Government policy towards Iran; and what is the estimated cost of the seminar to public funds.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our support for the forthcoming conference on Iran is in line with our policy of critical dialogue with Iran. This conference is aimed at promoting understanding of the Iranian economy and strengthening academic and economic contacts with Iranian professionals. We are contributing £1,500 towards conference costs.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Private Members' Bills

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council which private Members' Bills in the current parliamentary Session have been or are being drafted by the Office of Parliamentary Council, wholly or in part; and on whose instructions the drafting is or has been undertaken in each case.

Mr. Newton: To date, Parliamentary Counsel has provided drafting assistance for the following Bills on the instructions of the Departments shown and acting on the authority of Ministers.

Insurance Companies (Reserves) Bill (Trade and Industry)
Charities (Amendment) Bill (Home Office)
Proceeds of Crime Bill (Home Office)
Road Traffic (New Drivers) Bill (Transport)
Olympic Symbol Etc. (Protection) Bill (National Heritage)
Dogs (Fouling of Land) Bill (Environment)
Prisoners (Return to Custody) Bill (Home Office)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council what would be the current value of the financial assistance available to private Members for the drafting of balloted bills if it had been increased in line with inflation since its introduction.

Mr. Newton: A resolution of the House in 1971 authorised the payment of up to £200 to hon. Members securing one of the first 10 places in the ballot for private Members' Bills, to assist in the cost of drafting. The equivalent sum at 1994–95 prices would be £1,454.

Laptop Computers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee if he will request a copy of the report of the California Senate into the use of laptop computers for hon. Members in the House and Chamber; and if he will make a statement on whether a similar scheme could be analysed by his Department for implementation in the Commons.

Mr. Waller: I understand that the computer officer has requested a copy. I shall ask him to circulate it to the Committee when it is received, and to inform the hon. Member.

Upper Waiting Hall Exhibition

Sir Geoffrey Pattie: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an

application for an exhibition relating to the Shaftesbury Society to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 27 March to Friday 31 March 1995.

ENVIRONMENT

Fire Services

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will review the standard spending assessment formula in respect of the Staffordshire fire services;

(2) what was the standard spending assessment formula relating to fire service work for *(a)* inland and *(b)* coastal fire service authorities relating to fire service work for (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95 and (iv) proposed for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We are considering representations from local authorities about the proposed settlement for 1995–96, including one dated 6 January 1995 from Staffordshire county council, which asks for a change to the proposed methodology on the fire element of SSAs.

The same formula is used for inland and coastal authorities. The formulae for 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 are published in part 4 of the local government finance report for the relevant year and for 1995–96 in the draft local government finance report 1995–96.

House Renovation Grants

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses in Lewisham are in a condition which would qualify them for repairs or renovation grants; and what is the average cost per household of such grants.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has not made estimates of numbers of properties which would qualify for renovation grants in individual London boroughs. Qualification depends both on the condition of the property and the circumstances of the owner.

The London borough of Lewisham commissioned the Lewisham private sector house condition survey in 1993. This estimated that 9,500 private homes—14 per cent.—in the London borough of Lewisham did not meet current fitness standards. It does not estimate how many of these homes would qualify for renovation grants if their owners applied, or the cost of such grants.

Mandatory renovation grants made by the local authority to households in Lewisham in 1994–95 are expected to average around £12,300 each, while discretionary minor works grants are expected to average around £600 each.

Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent on industrial investment and environmental improvements by the northern development company in the Blyth Valley constituency in each year since 1989.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Nil. The Northern Development Co. is essentially a promotional organisation co-ordinating inward investment activities in the region.

Damping Grant

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what damping grant is allocated to Nottinghamshire county council in *(a)* actual and *(b)* real terms; and what level in each case is allocated to the average shire council.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: "Damping" or SSA reduction grant was introduced in 1994–95 to assist local authorities which experienced a reduction of more than 2 per cent. in their standard spending assessment as a result of the revision of SSA methodology in 1993 or by the incorporation of 1991 census data. No county council experienced such changes and none therefore received SSA reduction grant. Nottingham city council did and received £1.146 million in 1994–95.

Under the proposed settlement, reduction grant in respect of the changes in 1994–95 will continue to be paid in 1995–96 with an increase in the threshold for payment up to a further 2 per cent. to 4 per cent. The amount of SSA reduction grant that Nottingham city council will receive under the proposed settlement is £348,000.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what redundancies have been made at the Building Research Establishment; what plans he has for the future of the centre; what assistance is provided by the centre to developing countries; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: There have been no redundancies at the Building Research Establishment.

The establishment's policy and resources framework is under review; this includes consideration of whether executive agency status is the most appropriate basis for BRE's future operations. My right hon. Friend will make a statement in due course.

I have asked the chief executive of BRE to write to the hon. Member about the establishment's work in developing countries.

Letter from R.G. Courtney to Mr. George Foulkes, dated 13 January 1995:

BRE ASSISTANCE TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The Minister for Construction has asked me to reply to the part of your Parliamentary Question which concerns the assistance BRE provides to developing countries. This currently takes various forms which I outline below.

Research and associated advice

Medium-term programmes of research, carried out over a period of three years or so, have addressed many issues relevant to construction in developing countries. They are normally funded by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and often includes joint research undertaken with organisations in developing countries. A current ODA-funded programme is demonstrating the value of energy-efficient refurbishment of domestic apartments in China. In this, we are working with the Chinese Academy of

Building Research. BRE recently concluded a project on low-cost housing in Malaysia carried out with the Universiti Sains Malaysia and the University of Wales. This was partly funded by ODA, with further assistance from the British Council.

Commissions

BRE receives commissions, often through ODA or other aid agencies but sometimes directly from the countries concerned, to undertake short-term research-based work to meet specific needs. Examples of this during 1994/95 have included assistance to the timber industry in Honduras, and to the Ministry of Construction in Vietnam. We have also assisted developing countries establish their own building research organisations. For example, BRE advised the Ministry of the Interior in Taiwan on the development of its Building Research Institute, and now continues to provide advice and training to the Institute, at present in fire research and testing.

Attached workers

BRE has 'attached workers' from developing countries, for periods of training or to gain research experience. The enclosed BRE Overseas Information Paper explains the scheme. At any time there are usually two or three attached workers at BRE. They are generally in receipt of a scholarship from an aid agency or from their own government.

Advice to enquirers

Provision of advice to enquirers from developing countries is funded by ODA at a cost in 1994/95 of nearly £20k Enquiries are usually concerned with the design of low cost housing and community buildings, the use of alternative building materials and the principles of construction suitable to withstand natural forces such as earthquakes and hurricanes. They are replied to individually, but are often answered by sending an Overseas Building Note. This series of publications has been funded by ODA although no funds are currently available for its development.

Distribution of research reports

BRE distributes a limited number of free copies of research reports, and other publications to similar organisations in developing countries, usually on an exchange basis but sometimes as gifts to develop international co-operation.

International collaboration

In its main programmes, BRE collaborates with universities and technical institutions from many countries, including developing countries. For example, BRE has an agreement with the Sichuan Institute of Building Research in China, under which the Institute assists BRE by carrying out a small programme of masonry research under a sub-contract.

In total, BRE received £141k from ODA programmes in 1993/94.

I hope this information will be helpful; please let me know if you would like me to expand on any aspect of our work.

River Quality

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many rivers in Britain were found not to be conforming to the basic European standards of hygiene in the last year for which information is available; and if he will list them.

Mr. Atkins: No rivers in the United Kingdom are subject to European Union hygiene standards.

Charging (Water and Sewerage)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the expected date when he will announce his decision on the future charging arrangements for water and sewerage.

Mr. Atkins: In due course.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible for six executive agencies: Ordnance Survey; the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre; Security Facilities Executive; Building Research Establishment; the Buying Agency; and the Planning Inspectorate. The division of responsibilities and relationship between the Secretary of State and each of these agencies is set out in their respective framework documents. Copies of these documents are available in the House of Commons Library.

BATNEEC

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1104*, if he will qualify what constitutes BATNEEC, best available techniques not entailing excessive costs; when his Department first instigated this acronym; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Chapter 7 of the "Integrated Pollution Control: A Practical Guide", available in the Library of the House, provides guidance as to the meaning of BATNEEC. Guidance is issued by the Secretary of State and the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution as to BATNEEC standards for industrial processes falling within the local authority air pollution control and integrated pollution control systems respectively. The acronym derives from section 7 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, but has its origins in the concept of best practicable means first set in national legislation in the Alkali Act of 1874.

Regeneration Funding

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total resources made available to *(a)* Nottingham city council and *(b)* Nottinghamshire county council for regeneration in each of the last five years by central Government programmes.

Mr. Curry: The following resources were made available to Nottingham city council and Nottinghamshire county council specifically for regeneration purposes in each of the last five years:

Nottingham City Council

	1990–91 £k	*1991–92* £k	*1992–93* £k	*1993–94* £k	*1994–95* £k	*Total* £k
Urban Programme	4,178.0	3,783.0	3,790.0	2,694.0	1,582.0	16,027.0
Urban Partnership Fund	0.0	0.0	0.0	370.0	0.0	370.0
Derelict Land Grant	25.0	139.0	600.0	360.0	104.0	1,228.0

Nottingham City Council

	1990–91 £k	*1991–92* £k	*1992–93* £k	*1993–94* £k	*1994–95* £k	*Total* £k
City Challenge	0.0	0.0	7,585.0	8,420.0	7,580.0	23585.0
Estate Action	934.0	5,527.0	5,083.0	5,702.0	7,108.0	24,354.0
Flats over Shops Scheme	0.0	0.0	0.0	92.0	80.0	172.0
Compacts	0.0	3.5	77.8	124.5	104.9	310.8
Teacher Placements	0.0	2.4	27.6	37.7	5.2	72.9
Education Business Partnerships	0.0	0.0	19.0	11.9	4.8	35.7
Total	5,137.0	9,459.9	17,182.5	17,812.0	16,569.0	66,155.4

In addition, the city council has received approval to £8.96m European regional development funds over the five-year period.

Nottingham County Council

	1991–92 £k	*1992–93* £k	*1993–94* £k	*1994–95* £k	*1995–96* £k	*Total*
Urban Programme	672.0	1218.0	947.0	531.0	227.0	3595.0
Urban Partnership Fund	0.0	0.0	0.0	65.0	0.0	65.0
Derelict Land Grant	1200.0	1728.0	2631.0	2134.0	2970.0	10663.0
Coal Area Fund	0.0	0.0	0.0	384.0	0.0	384.0
[1]GEST 19 (for raising standards in Inner City Schools)	0.0	0.0	300.0	508.0	173.0	981.0
Compacts	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	22.1	72.1
Teacher Placements	0.0	0.0	20.8	27.3	18.9	67.0
Education Business Partnerships	0.0	0.0	38.8	93.9	55.7	188.4
Total:	1872.0	2946.0	3937.7	3793.2	3466.7	16015.5

[1]GEST = Grant for Education Support and Training.

In addition, the county council has received approval to £14.21m European regional development funds over the five-year period.

Desulphurisation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the number of days in 1993 and 1994 that power generation desulphurisation plant was switched off.

Mr. Atkins: Drax and Ratcliffe-on-Soar are the only two power stations fitted with flue gas desulphurisation equipment; installation of FGD at these stations is still in progress.

The first two FGD units at Drax have been operational since February 1994. From then until the end of 1994 they have operated for 98 per cent. of the time that the boilers to which they are linked were operating. The FGD units were off-line for the remainder of the time primarily due to a shut-down for a planned inspection.

The first FGD unit at Ratcliffe-on-Soar has been operational since March 1994. From then until the end of 1994 it has operated for 95 per cent. of the time that the boilers to which it is linked were operating. The FGD unit was off-line for the remainder of the time for inspection work and running repairs-fault rectification.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by power station the funds received from the European Economic Community for desulphurisation plant.

Mr. Atkins: I am not aware that the two generating companies in England and Wales have received any such funds.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which coal-burning power stations currently have desulphurisation plants.

Mr. Atkins: At present, flue gas desulphurisation equipment operates, or is under construction, for 4 GW of capacity at National Power's Drax power station and for 2 GW of capacity at Powergen's Radcliffe-on-Soar power station.

Dog Fouling

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the recommendations of the advisory group on litter concerning dog fouling; and what is his response.

Sir Paul Beresford: The recommendations of the litter advisory group concerning dog fouling were published as a consultation document on 20 July 1994. The Government's response was set out in the reply by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Sir G. Bright) on 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *664*.

Tyne and Wear

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he has made with the creation of an enterprise zone in the catchment area of the former Swan Hunter's shipyard following the Minister for Industry's statement to the House on 12 May 1993, *Official Report*, columns 801–809.

Sir Paul Beresford: Progress on proposals for new enterprise zone sites on Tyneside has been necessarily delayed during the period of uncertainty over the future of the Swan Hunter shipyards. The three local authorities concerned and the Tyne and Wear development corporation have now submitted a package of sites for consideration and this is being examined by the Government Office for the North East.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of a new enterprise zone in Tyne and Wear on *(a)* the work of the existing city challenge projects in inner west Newcastle and North Shields and *(b)* employment levels in the former shipbuilding communities of east Newcastle and Wallsend.

Sir Paul Beresford: No decision has been taken on the sites to be included in the proposals for a new enterprise zone in Tyne and Wear. As soon as agreement is reached, the relevant planning authorities will be asked to submit detailed economic analyses of their proposals.

Water Supply Disconnections

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many domestic properties had their water supply disconnected in Walthamstow in 1994; and how many of these were in properties which had water meters.

Mr. Atkins: Information on disconnections by local authority district and by charging method is not available centrally. The Director General of Water Services publishes information on disconnections twice a year, by water company area and by domestic and non-domestic customer. Information on disconnections in the six months to 30 September 1994 was published in an Ofwat news release on 15 November 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

Erosion Review

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his review of erosion, deposition and flooding in Great Britain.

Sir Paul Beresford: It is expected that the review of erosion, deposition and flooding in Great Britain, commissioned by my Department, will be published in May 1995.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department has not granted preferred carrier status to any airline.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the absenteeism rate for the Building Research Establishment in each year since 1991.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information available is:

Year	*Proportion of working days lost through sick absences per cent.*
1991	2.0
1992	2.0
1993	2.1
1994	2.1

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the absenteeism rate for the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in each year since 1991.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number of staff employed*	*Number of sick days*
1991	67	268
1992	66	[1]582
1993	64	[1]356
1994	64	[1]314

[1] These figures are distorted by the following individual sick records:

Year	*Number and reason*	*Days*
1992	1—Depression	124
	1—M.E.	106
	1—Pregnancy problems	98
1993	1—Heart bypass	119
1994	1—Depression	80

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the absenteeism rate for the Security Facilities Executive in each year since 1991.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Security Facilities Executive was established as an executive agency in October 1993. In its first year of operation the average sick absence rate to the nearest whole number of days was eight per person.

Geevor Tin Mine

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the pollution threat caused by the flooding of Geevor tin mine in Cornwall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The National Rivers Authority has monitored closely the level and quality of water in Geevor mine. In its view, the water now flowing from the mine has had a localised and limited impact, and is easily dispersed by the coastal waters.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who currently owns and has responsibility for maintaining Geevor tin mine in Cornwall.

Mr. Atkins: The surface freehold of Geevor mine is owned by Cornwall county council. I understand that the underground workings of the mine were abandoned in 1991.

Dog Registration

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to him since the 1992 general election in favour of the introduction of a dog registration scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department regularly receives representations on this issue. For example, in response to the advisory group on litter recommendations on dog fouling last year, we received 104 letters which supported the idea of dog registration.

However, the Government's view has consistently been that dog registration would be bureaucratic and difficult to enforce and that the irresponsible owner would be very unlikely to register. Dog control legislation related to specific problems, as in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and elsewhere, is, we believe, the most appropriate way of tackling these issues.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Sir Paul Beresford: No central record is maintained of the sources of names of appointees and in some cases they may have been nominated from more than one source. However, from the information readily available, it appears that three of the individuals appointed during 1994 were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Albert Dock Development

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to visit the Merseyside development corporation to investigate complaints by residents about the Albert dock development; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have no plans to visit the Merseyside development corporation for this purpose.

I am aware of the concerns of the residents of the Albert dock on some points and have written to the hon. Member. The corporation is continuing to work with the residents, long leaseholder and developer to find a way to resolve problems. In particular, the MDC has liaised with the leaseholder and the residents on the question of the unsatisfactory windows and is hoping to set up a meeting with the two parties on the other issues. A meeting between the developer and the residents has also enabled progress to be made on the question of the further development of residential accommodation.

Grand Regatta Columbus

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he plans to take with respect to the chairman and chief executive of the Merseyside development corporation following the publication of the third report of the Committee of Public Accounts of Session 1994–95, HC 94, on the grand regatta Columbus.

Sir Paul Beresford: I have no plans to take action. I have every confidence that the chairman and chief executive of the Merseyside development corporation will take the necessary action to address the shortcomings in financial management highlighted in the PAC report. Indeed, they have been co-operating with the Department to that end since the publication of the NAO report on the grand regatta Columbus and fanfare for a new world concert in March 1995.

Council Tax

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the impact of a significant event affecting the valuation of properties on valuation of properties for council tax purposes.

Mr. Curry: For council tax purposes, all dwellings are allocated to valuation bands according to the price that they might reasonably have been expected to have fetched had they been sold, subject to certain assumptions, on 1 April 1991. The listing officer will be prepared to review the banding where there has been a change in the physical state of its locality, for example where a major new road is opened, which has the effect of reducing the value of the dwellings in that area. The impact of such a "significant event" on the housing market will, of course, vary from case to case.

TRANSPORT

Merchant Navy Veterans

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement in respect of travel, accommodation and light refreshment expenses payable to Merchant Navy veterans for 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The extent of future funding for Merchant Navy representatives on Remembrance Sunday has not yet been decided, but the Department will continue to meet reasonable travel and subsistence costs incurred by MN wreath layers.

Selby Bypass

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many objections have been identified to the draft compulsory purchase orders for the projected Selby bypass; what public inquiry proceedings are expected in relation to the objections received; and when the inquiry will be held.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Michael Alison, dated 17 January 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the draft Compulsory Purchase Order for the proposed A63 Selby Bypass scheme.

To date, 10 objections to this draft Order have been received. Arrangements are being made for these to be dealt with, along with the 14 objections to the draft Supplement Side Roads Order, at a Public Inquiry starting on 30 May this year.

I hope this is helpful.

Roads

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of (i) motorway and (ii) trunk roads are currently *(a)* open, *(b)* under construction, *(c)* at the planning inquiry stage or *(d)* under active consideration as part of the roads programme either (1) as new motorway-trunk road or (2) as existing motorway-trunk road being widened; if he will identify in each case the location and parliamentary constituency; which projects will now be subjected to further review arising out of his response to the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment report; and what new assessment will be used.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information, which covers England only, is in the following table:

		Miles of motorway	*Miles of all purpose trunk road*
a) Open		1,905	9,465
b) Under construction (Start of works to completion)	New	59	24
	Widening	14	89
c) Planning Inquiry Stage (Orders Published to Start of Works)	New	30	43
	Widening	193	55
d) Under active consideration as part of the Road Programme	New	99	798
	Widening	598	176

The location of schemes in the national road programme is shown in the "Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review" published by my Department in March last year. Copies are in the Library of the House.

I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to send the hon. Member details of the parliamentary constituencies in which those schemes fall. A copy of those details will be placed in the Library.

All schemes at the planning stage will be reviewed against the guidance issued to the Highways Agency with the Government's response to the SACTRA report.

Rail Track Sale (London)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was raised from the sale of rail track from the area south-west of London Underground Leyton Central line station; what organisation received the profits from the sale; what has happened to the proceeds of the sale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The Secretary of State is acquiring by compulsory purchase land and rights over land to the south-west of Leyton underground station extending to some 12 acres of former railway land in and around the Temple Mills area. Negotiations over the terms of purchase and compensation settlement continue.

Double-decker Buses

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what EC regulations apply to the manufacture and use in the United Kingdom of double-decker buses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 require certain systems and components in vehicles to comply with the performance requirements of EC directives or United Nations Economic Commission for Europe regulations. We are currently awaiting an EC proposal for a draft directive on bus and coach construction.

A15 (Telephones)

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when work to install emergency telephones on the A15 Barnetby Top-Humber Bridge section will commence; and when it will be completed.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Michael Brown, dated 17 January 1995:

John Watts, the Minister for Roads and Railways, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about when work will begin, and be completed, to install emergency telephones on the A15 between Barnetby Top and Humber Bridge.

Work will start at the end of January and will take four weeks, subject to good weather.

Commercial Vehicles (Safety)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many commercial vehicles were stopped and inspected; how many were found to be defective; and how many of those defective had defective brakes in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1993.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1995:

Vehicle Spot Checks

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of commercial vehicles stopped and inspected, how many were found to be defective and how many of those defective had defective brakes in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

The information requested is not available by calendar year and has been provided for the financial years (April to March) 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 and is shown in tabular form below.

Number of Vehicles Inspected during Roadworthiness Spot Checks

	Heavy goods vehicles	*Trailers (HGV)*	*Buses and coaches*
1991–92	90,118	22,565	21,106
1992–93	100,337	26,033	24,895
1993–94	93,690	26,645	24,521

The inspections above revealed that the following number of vehicles had serious roadworthiness defects which resulted in prohibition action being taken.

Number of immediate and delayed roadworthiness prohibitions

	Heavy goods vehicles	*Trailers (HGV)*	*Buses and coaches*
1991–92	14,075	3,557	2,552
1992–93	14,678	3,354	2,289
1993–94	14,888	3,882	2,419

The number of these vehicles inspected during roadworthiness spot checks, which had defective brakes, is not available for these inspections alone or in the form requested. The information available, provided below, shows recorded brake related defects as a percentage of all defects recorded from prohibition notices. The data is taken from roadworthiness spot check inspections and roadworthiness inspections done for operator licensing purposes. Data for 1991/92 is not available.

	Heavy goods vehicles per cent.	*Trailers (HGV) per cent.*	*Buses and Coaches per cent.*
1991–92	n/a	n/a	n/a
1992–93	30.5	42	19
1993–94	32.5	43	19

The information on inspections does not include:

(i) roadworthiness enforcement activity on light goods vehicles; and

(ii) limited roadworthiness spot checks confined to vehicle lighting or exhaust emissions.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to remove any commercial vehicles found to have defective brakes from the roads *(a)* for three months for the first offence, *(b)* for 12 months for a second offence and *(c)* confiscation for the third offence by the same owners/operators.

Mr. Norris: No. Sanctions are properly a matter for the courts and the traffic commissioners.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Marine Safety Agency will complete its survey of those ports which have facilities to accept chemical contaminated waste; if he will list the ports so designated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about ports which have facilities for accepting chemical contaminated wastes.

The Marine Safety Agency has a policy of constantly reviewing the provision of waste reception facilities at ports. This is in part to meet our commitment to ensure that the facilities are adequate under the International Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, know as MARPOL. The Department of Transport is also assessing the provision of facilities to assist in the development of measures following the recommendations in Lord Donaldson's report into the prevention of pollution from merchant shipping "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas".

At the moment we have two surveys in hand: a questionnaire survey of the types and capacity of reception facilities and an independent assessment of the adequacy of those facilities. The responses from the questionnaire survey were received in late 1994 and are currently being analysed. We also hope that the team of consultants carrying out the second assessment will have finalised their reports shortly. I will send you personal copies of both reports when they are available.

Vehicle Checks

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he currently assesses the roadworthiness of cars, heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles; and what plans he has to vary the present requirement for the production of MOT certificates as a prerequisite for the purchase of vehicle excise duty tax discs.

Mr. Norris: Vehicles are assessed for roadworthiness at annual tests. They are also checked at the roadside by the police and examiners from the Vehicle Inspectorate.

I have no plans to change the current check of MOT test certificates when vehicles are relicensed.

Concessionary Travel, London

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to impose a concessionary travel scheme for pensioners and disabled people across London for the coming year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: None. The provision of travel concessions for elderly and disabled people is a matter for the London local authorities. I understand that the boroughs have agreed a scheme for London Transport services for the coming year, but are still considering the arrangements for London rail services.

Wrightington Hospital Mobility Centre

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funding assistance his Department will give to the accredited mobility centre at Wrightington hospital in Lancashire when its grant from the regional health authority ends.

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport mobility advice and vehicle information service has provided support to the mobility centre at Wrightington over a number of years through loans of vehicles and equipment and the services of its peripatetic driving adviser. The Department has no means to provide funding assistance.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Norris: Two.

Cones Hotline

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest calculation of the total number of calls to the cones hotline that *(a)* required the removal of cones and *(b)* did not justify action; and what was the total loss of cones hotline.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 17 January 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest calculation of the total number of calls to the Cones Hotline that *(a)* required the removal of cones and *(b)* did not justify action; and what was the total cost of the Cones Hotline.

As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency, I have been asked to reply.

The Cones Hotline has currently received 12,100 calls since its inception in June 1992. Of these, 6,100 cases have been complaints about observations on cones and traffic management at roadworks which have been followed up by the relevant regional office. As a consequence of this follow up action, there have been 5 cases where it has been necessary to remove the traffic management. The remaining calls have comprised general enquiries and requests for information which have been dealt with immediately.

Since March 1994, the Cones Hotline has operated on a dedicated local call rate number. The cost of running the Cones Hotline is approximately £5000 per annum, including call charges. Other running costs are not separately identifiable since they have been, and are still being, met from within budgets agreed before the Hotline was established.

I hope this information is helpful.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Speeding

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for controlling excessive speeding by vehicles along the Shore road, Ballyhalbert; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The Department is not aware of a speeding problem at Shore road, Ballyhalbert where a 30 mph speed limit exists. However the matter will be brought to the attention of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which is responsible for enforcing speed limits.

RUC

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number and names of the groups and organisations which are to be consulted by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland with regard to changes in the structure of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and what is the estimated cost of this exercise.

Sir John Wheeler: This is a matter for the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. However, I understand that, in pursuit of its statutory obligation to make arrangements for obtaining the views of people about policing, after consulting the Chief Constable the authority wishes to give as many individuals, community groups and organisations as possible the opportunity to have their say about future policing needs and priorities in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, the authority plans to provide information about the consultation exercise to each household in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, the authority plans to provide information about the consultation exercise to each household in Northern Ireland and to invite views from political and religious groupings, business and trade union organisations, justice, peace, legal, community, sporting, social, charity and youth bodies. Including newspaper advertisements, printing and postage, the cost of the project is estimated at £70,000. The authority is seeking responses by 2 May 1995.

Eggs

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the expected impact of the compulsory user of heat-treated feed on Northern Ireland egg production; whether the Northern Ireland Egg Producers Association was consulted prior to the decision to make this feed compulsory; whether the use of heat-treated feed is compulsory for egg production in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the future prospects for the Northern Ireland egg industry.

Mr. Ancram: There is an additional cost in the use of heat-treated feed. Although some egg producers are concerned about possible adverse effects on egg quality, this has not been substantiated in the experimental work carried out by the Department of Agriculture. A significant number of egg producers in Northern Ireland are using heat-treated feed successfully.

The heat treatment requirement was introduced in 1991 following consultation with the egg and poultry industry to protect the industry against the introduction of Newcastle disease through a feed source. The Northern Ireland Egg Producers Association was not in existence at the time.

The use of heat-treated poultry feeding stuffs is not compulsory in Great Britain.

The Northern Ireland egg industry, which has a reputation for producing quality eggs, can maintain its position on the export market and look forward with confidence to the future.

Maze Prison

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many firearms are under the control of prisoners at Her Majesty's prison at the Maze; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners at Her Majesty's Maze prison have access to mobile telephones; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: Prisoners are not permitted mobile telephones. There are reports about the supposed availability of mobile telephones in HMP Maze and these are subject to investigation and regular searching procedures.

Industrial Development Board

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new jobs have been provided in the boroughs of *(a)* Ards and *(b)* Castlereagh in each of the past five years as a result of assistance from the Industrial Development Board; and when the IDB last arranged a visit to each of these boroughs by a potential inward investor.

Mr. Ancram: Information on jobs promoted with assistance from the Industrial Development Board in the Ards and Castlereagh district council areas is set out in the table. The last visit by potential inward investors, arranged by IDB, was on 15 September 1994 in the case of Ards district council and on 14 December 1994 to Castlereagh district council area.

Jobs promoted with IDB assistance

	Ards	*Castlereagh*
1990–91	50	68
1991–92	149	84
1992–93	49	—
1993–94	41	—
1994 (April to December)	—	14
Total	289	166

AIDS

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have died as a result of AIDS or illness associated with AIDS in each of the past five years.

Mr. Moss: The number of persons known to have died in Northern Ireland as a result of AIDS, or illness associated with AIDS, in each of the past five years is given below:

1990: 9[1]

1991: 5

1992: 4

1993: 3[1]

1994: 5 (provisional)

[1] Includes one case diagnosed in England.

Cattle

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leucosis; what the figure was 12 months ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: None. There has never been any recorded outbreaks of enzootic bovine leucosis in Northern Ireland. In 1991 Northern Ireland was recognised as an EBL free region of the EC.

Civil Servants

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants are employed by the Northern Ireland Office *(a)* in Stormont and *(b)* in Whitehall.

Sir John Wheeler: The number of civil servants employed by the Northern Ireland Office on 30 December 1994 was 1,556.

Of this total, 486 are employed in Stormont, 104 in Whitehall and the remainder at other locations throughout Northern Ireland.

Terrorists (Educational Background)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies have been carried out by his Department into the educational attainments of persons convicted of terrorist-type crimes in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: It is not normal practice to conduct general studies of prisoners' attainments regardless of their convictions. However, the prior educational attainments of individual prisoners are assessed when they are being advised about the opportunities available to them during their imprisonment.

Records of examination results achieved in prisons are included each year in the annual report of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Vehicle Registration Numbers

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the ranges of the vehicle registration numbers in Northern Ireland which have not been issued; what arrangements he has made for the sale of those numbers; when he now expects to dispose of them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: Registration marks in the following series have not been issued:

Marks 1 to 99 in each of the following series:

ABZ, BBZ, BDZ, CBZ, DBZ, DDZ, DUI, EDZ, FDZ, FIL, GDZ, IIW, IXI, JJI, JIW, JXI, KIB, KJI, KXI, LIB, LJI, LXI, MIB, MXI, NXI, OXI, WIJ, XIJ, CDZ, JIB, YIJ.

Marks 1 to 999 in each of the following series:

AAZ, BAZ, CAZ, DAZ, EAZ, EBZ, EUI, FAZ, FBZ,GBZ, GIL, GUI, HBZ, HUI, IBZ, IDZ, IIL, JBZ, JDZ, KBZ, KDZ, KIW, LDZ, LIW, MDZ, MIW, MJI, NDZ, NIB, NIW, NJI, OIB, OIW, OJI, PIW, PDZ, PIB, PJI, PXI, RDZ, RIB, RIW, RJI, RXI, SDZ, SIB, SXI, TIB, TJI, TXI, UIB, UXI, VIB, VXI, WIB, WXI, XXI, YXI.

Marks 1 to 1999 in the following series:

JIL, HIL, LIL.

The series FUI and KIL were not issued since it was considered that their use might give rise to offence.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland—the agency with responsibility for the registration of vehicles in Northern Ireland—is considering the administrative arrangement, including the need for legislation, which would be required to enable these marks to be offered for sale to the public. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement in a few months about the introduction of a sale of marks scheme in Northern Ireland.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *403*, what percentage of total admissions was represented by emergency hospital admissions.

Mr. Moss: The information is as follows:

Year	*Emergency admissions as a percentage of total admissions*
1989–90	45
1990–91	42
1991–92	40
1992–93	37
1993–94	37

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the individuals appointed

by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Sir John Wheeler: None of the individuals appointed to public positions in the last year was first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Stormont (Fire)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the cost of repairing and restoring the Parliament buildings, Stormont; when he expects the work to begin and end; and if he will ensure that the building will be repaired to the standard existing before the fire of 2 January.

Mr. Moss: No estimate has yet been taken about the restoration of the former House of Commons Chamber. I will, however, be reviewing options in the light of prevailing circumstances.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the fire and smoke detection equipment installed in the Parliament buildings, Stormont, and whether any fire suppression or control equipment including sprinkler systems were in place; what was the distance between the building and the nearest fire hydrant; and if he will make a statement on the fire of 2 January.

Mr. Moss: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Gentleman the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) on 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *235–36*.

Road Deaths

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have died in road accidents in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years; in each year how many were *(a)* pedestrians, *(b)* drivers, *(c)* motor cyclists, *(d)* car passengers, *(e)* car drivers, *(f)* heavy goods vehicle drivers, *(g)* heavy goods vehicle passengers and *(h)* others; and in regard to each such category how many of the deaths were attributable in some degree to (i) alcohol, (ii) speed and (iii) not wearing a seat belt.

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to state whether or not fatalities are attributable in any degree to failure to wear a seat belt. Seat belt usage information for fatalities is provided for information.

1991

Class	*Killed*	*Alcohol principle factor*	*Alcohol contributory factor*	*Speed principle factor*	*Speed contributory factor*
Pedestrians	45	8	3	6	0
Pedal cyclists	9	1	0	2	0
Motor cyclists	17	4	0	4	3
Car passengers	49	6	1	17	0
Car Drivers	57	14	0	15	9
HGV drivers	5	0	1	2	0
HGV passengers	0	0	0	0	0
Others	3	1	0	0	0

Seat belt usage for fatalities in 1991

Class	*In use*	*Not in use*	*Not known*	*Exempt*
Car passengers	23	16	9	1
Car drivers	33	13	8	3
HGV drivers	Category	Exempt	—	—
HGV passengers	Category	Exempt	—	—
Others	0	0	0	0

1992

Class	*Killed*	*Alcohol principle factor*	*Alcohol contributory factor*	*Speed principle factor*	*Speed contributory factor*
Pedestrians	47	13	0	2	2
Pedal cyclists	7	3	0	1	1
Motor cyclists	11	2	0	4	1
Car passengers	29	8	0	5	4
Car drivers	43	10	0	13	9
HGV drivers	2	1	0	0	0
HGV passengers	2	0	0	1	0
Others	9	1	0	0	0

Seat belt usage for fatalities in 1992

Class	*In use*	*Not in use*	*Not known*	*Exempt*
Car passengers	12	11	5	1
Car drivers	20	10	11	2

Seat belt usage for fatalities in 1992

Class	In use	Not in use	Not known	Exempt
HGV drivers	Category	Exempt	—	—
HGV passengers	Category	Exempt	—	—
Others	0	8	1	0

1993

Class	Killed	Alcohol principle factor	Alcohol contributory factor	Speed principle factor	Speed contributory factor
Pedestrians	42	11	0	0	0
Pedal cyclists	6	0	0	0	0
Motor cyclists	16	4	0	3	2
Car passengers	21	5	0	8	2
Car drivers	54	16	1	14	8
HGV drivers	1	0	0	0	1
HGV passengers	0	0	0	0	0
Others	3	0	0	1	0

Seat belt usage for fatalities in 1993

Class	In use	Not in use	Not known	Exempt
Car passengers	9	1	11	0
Car drivers	18	11	24	1
HGV drivers	Category	Exempt	—	—
HGV passengers	Category	Exempt	—	—
others	0	0	0	3

The provisional road traffic accident fatalities figure for 1994 is 157. A breakdown is not yet available.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Swimming Teaching

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidelines he has issued in respect of minimum levels and standards of swimming teaching in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Detailed advice on safe practice in the teaching of swimming is included in the handbook "Safe Practice in Physical Education" which was first published in 1985 by the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education. A revised edition of the handbook was published in 1990 with the approval and recommendation of the, then, Department of Education and Science.

The advice includes details about recommended teacher/tutor qualifications, supervision, pupils' behaviour, pool safety and equipment.

Precise teaching methods are a matter for individual schools, and it is for schools to satisfy themselves that those who teach swimming are suitably qualified.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will visit James Brindley high school and Tunstall swimming pool to discuss the operation of the standard spending assessment formula applied by the Department of Environment in respect of the teaching of swimming to school children.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage nor I has any immediate plans to visit this school or swimming pool. The Government have set the overall totals for local authority spending in a way which allows all authorities to increase their spending in 1995–96. But each council is solely responsible for determining its spending priorities between and within services, in deciding the amount to be spent on schools swimming.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what assessment he has made of the teaching resources required to ensure adequate levels of swimming teaching for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools;

(2) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment to ensure adequate provision is made for swimming teaching in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Surveys carried out by this Department have shown a considerable commitment from schools and local education authorities to swimming in schools. Implementation of national curriculum physical education began in August 1992. However, because of the difficulty which some schools might have had in providing swimming tuition, the implementation of the swimming requirements of the PE curriculum were deferred until August 1994. This allowed those schools which needed it another two years to make the arrangements necessary to provide swimming tuition.

Second World War Commemoration

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how he proposes to fund the programme of events in Hyde park, from 6 to 8 May, to

commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell: During the current financial year it will be necessary to make payments to Messrs Unusual Industries, which has been contracted to provide the specified service. Consultancy payments will also be made to a programme project manager. Parliamentary approval for this new service is being sought in a supplementary estimate for the Department of National Heritage vote for film, tourism, sport and broadcasting—class XI, vote 5.

The associated costs of the Department's support team will be met from the Department of National Heritage administration vote—class XI, vote 7—within existing provision.

National Lottery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the charities that have so far benefited from the Government share of the national lottery.

Mr. Dorrell: No applicants, including charities, have yet received funding from the proceeds of the national lottery. The proceeds will remain invested until the distributing bodies are ready to pay grants to good causes.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with Camelot plc on measures to ensure that the operation of the national lottery reflects the policy of equal validity of the Welsh and English languages; if he will make it his policy to ensure implementation of the policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for the Director General of the National Lottery. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

GP Fundholding

13. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to encourage more general practitioner practices to become fundholding.

Mr. Malone: We have recently announced a major extension of the options for general practitioner fundholding. Our aim is to extend the benefits for patients as widely as possible.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *401*, if she will now publish information for 1993–94 on general practitioner fundholders' savings.

Mr. Malone: Final audited information is not yet available.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the total administrative costs of general practitioner fundholding in 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* General practitioner fundholding practices receive additional allowances for directly managing their funds and purchasing care on their patients' behalf. These costs represent about 2 per cent. of budgets set and amounted to £14.1 million in 1991–92, £29.5 million in 1992–93 and £49.5 million in 1993–94. Figures for 1994–95 are not yet available.

It is not possible to disaggregate other administration costs from total costs.

Patient Services (Charges)

14. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those trusts that are charging for television use and other patient services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Guy's Hospital

15. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received concerning the proposed closure of Guy's hospital accident and emergency unit.

Mr. Malone: South East London health authority is currently consulting on future services at Guy's and St. Thomas's hospitals and all representations received by the Department have been passed to SELHA to be taken into account.

Patient Treatments, North West Region

16. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were treated in the north-west region in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the figure in the previous year.

Mr. Sackville: The number of finished consultant episodes in the general and acute sector purchased by the national health service for patients from the former north-western region was 782,000 in 1993–94 compared with 748,000 in 1992–93—an increase of 4.5 per cent.

Ward Running Costs

17. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are estimated to be the respective costs of running the average *(a)* single sex and *(b)* mixed ward; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available. The cost of maintaining a bed for a patient depends more upon the specialty than on the sex of the patient. However, when properly used, mixed-sex accommodation can lead to a more efficient use of hospital beds, and better quality care for patients.

NHS (Private Sector Involvement)

18. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to further involve the private sector in the NHS; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Government welcome cost-effective co-operation between the national health service and the independent sector. NHS managers and general practitioner fundholders are encouraged at a local level to seek improved quality, better value for money and best use of resources, irrespective of whether it is from the public or private sector. Such co-operation is to the advantage of patients and the NHS.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health

if she will make a statement on her Department's plans to contract with the private sector to design, build and run district general hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for local decision.

Capitation Funding Formula

19. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to issue a simplified explanation of the new needs-driven formula of capitation funding for health authorities.

Mr. Sackville: A booklet entitled "HCHS (Hospital and Community Health Services) Revenue Resource Allocation: Weighted Capitation Formula" has been placed in the Library. It gives a simplified explanation of the modified weighted capitation formula.

Hospital Trust Boards

20. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria for appointment to hospital trust boards.

Mr. Malone: Non-executive directors of national health service trusts are appointed for their personal qualities and the knowledge and skills which they can bring to the post and not to represent any particular body or interest.

District Health Authorities

21. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of district health authorities in England; what was the number in March 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: There are 110 district health authorities in England. In March 1991 they numbered 189.

The reduction in the number of district health authorities is part of our programme for achieving more effective and efficient health authorities which link primary and secondary care, for streamlining management structures and improving the health of the population.

Health Services, Northumberland

22. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the provision of health services in south-east Northumberland; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Northumberland health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chief executive, Mrs. J. Axelby, for details.

Health Information

23. **Mr. Wolfson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to improve the provision of information on health matters for NHS patients and the wider public.

Mr. Malone: The patients charter sets out the right of every citizen to be given information on local health services, including quality standards and maximum waiting times. In January 1993, a national freephone health information service was launched which puts callers in contact with their local regional health information services. The service can be contacted free of charge on 0800 665544. It provides information in confidence about local national health services; patients charter standards and waiting times; common diseases, conditions and treatments, including details of self-help groups; how to complain about NHS services; and how to maintain and improve personal health. Health authorities produce annual reports for the public on hospitals' patients charter performance, and hospitals publicly display information to patients about their services, including their own patients charter performance, and a named person to whom complaints should be made. In June 1994, the first set of annual NHS comparative performance tables were published, showing the public how their local health services were performing under six main headings based upon patients charter information.

In addition, NHS trusts are required to publish an annual report and accounts, which includes information about the principal activities of the trust together with details of any activities in research and development with a comparison with that of the previous year. Recent measures have been taken to increase the information published in this document and from 1994–95, the report will include information on the trusts performance against a number of local-national patients charter standards.

NHS Waiting Times

24. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the average NHS waiting time since March 1988.

Mr. Malone: The average waiting time for hospital treatment has fallen from 9.2 months in March 1988 to 4.6 months in March 1994.

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS patients are seen *(a)* within five weeks and *(b)* within three months; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: In 1992–93, the latest year for which information is available, 56 per cent. of national health service patients admitted to hospital were admitted within five weeks, and 73 per cent. within three months.

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to make further progress in reducing the amount of time patients have to wait for hospital treatment.

Mr. Malone: The national health service has already made huge strides in reducing waiting times. In all but a handful of cases no one now waits more than two years for treatment, and the average waiting time has been cut from over nine months in 1987 to less than five months now. We expect to see further progress and from 1 April 1995 the maximum length of wait for in-patient or day case treatment for all patients will be reduced from 24 to 18 months. We will also introduce two new standards—a maximum waiting time of 12 months for patients waiting for coronary artery bypass grafts and some associated procedures and also, for the first time ever, a standard for the maximum wait for a first out-patient appointment.

Blood

25. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate has been made by her Department of the current shortfall in blood stocks at the present time.

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Authority has sufficient stocks to meet the needs of hospitals for blood at the present time.

27. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health

when she expects to make a decision about the future of the blood transfusion service.

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Authority has announced that it will ask an independent panel consisting of Professor A. Bellingham, president of the Royal College of Pathologists; Professor A. Breckenridge; Professor in Pharmacology, university of Liverpool; Dr. H. Gunson; previous medical director, National Blood Authority; and Mr. P. Griffiths; director, King's Fund college, to ensure that the authority, in coming to its final decisions, has given due and objective consideration to the comments received during its recent consultation. The authority will publish its final proposals in due course.

Alzheimer's Disease

26. **Mr. Barry Jones**: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what her Department's policy is on meeting the needs of younger people with Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: It is for the local health and social services authorities to assess the needs of younger people with Alzheimer's disease and to arrange to provide the appropriate services.

Community Care

28. **Mr. Alan W. Williams**: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to assess unmet community care needs.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities have the responsibility of assessing individual needs under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1989 and to decide with the individual concerned how best to meet these needs.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the Association of Directors of Social Services on the practice of cost-shunting of vulnerable elderly people between health authorities and local councils; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: As part of the new community care arrangements in England, local authorities have been required to reach agreements with health authorities on their respective responsibilities for continuing care and procedures for hospital discharge. These arrangements are being repeated for 1995–96 and local authorities have been asked to provide evidence of joint strategies to address any operational problems which have been identified. Arrangements in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

New-born babies

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new-born babies died in *(a)* the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust hospitals and *(b)* Ashington hospital in each year since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: No reliable figures are held centrally on this subject. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust, Mr. Roger Baker, for details.

Drug and Alcohol

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what purposes the drug and alcohol specific grant is intended to be put.

Mr. Bowis: The purposes of specific grant are:

1. to assist local authorities to develop the voluntary sector's contribution to improving the adequacy, quality and suitability of the social care elements of services for alcohol and drug misusers;

2. to support residential, day and domiciliary services as appropriate, according to local needs, especially for "hard to reach" groups;

3. to contribute to the planned provision of services for alcohol and/or drug misusers within local community care plans.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the amounts of drug and alcohol specific grant awarded to each London borough since 1990–91.

Mr. Bowis: The amounts of specific grant awarded at the start of each financial year since 1990–91 are shown in the table.

Name of borough	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
Barnet	—	—	5,274	5,387
Bexley	—	6,048	—	—
Brent	—	—	43,458	79,067
Barking and Dagenham	—	7,161	24,360	31,360
Camden	22,600	10,044	7,984	47,420
Corporation of the City of London	—	—	—	61,788
Croydon	7,350	5,325	8,883	16,310
Ealing	—	—	—	24,358
Greenwich	5,500	6,000	6,125	—
Hackney	—	21,000	35,000	35,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	35,706	31,006	42,321	15,165.50
Haringey	—	—	—	63,000
Harrow	—	—	8,520	—
Havering	—	7,161	—	—
Hillingdon	—	—	—	7,025
Hounslow	17,505	16,862	21,490	61,888
Islington	34,009	50,030	73,289	91,688
Kensington and Chelsea	102,492	135,812	126,910	63,888
Kingston	11,666	18,500	—	—
Lambeth	17,500	21,000	39,746	18,630
Lewisham	12,527	47,599	15,619	14,619
Merton	—	—	10,066	—
Newham	—	7,161	—	93,842
Redbridge	—	19,761	—	—
Richmond	7,700	7,700	15,400	—
Southwark	41,548	105,957	65,910	35,641
Sutton	—	18,512	18,512	124,212
Tower Hamlets	104,062	166,660	117,165	100,500
Waltham Forest	50,505	65,225	62,841	—
Wandsworth	—	44,882	49,666	49,866
Westminster	42,000	18,340	79,552	109,091

Cheviot and Wansbeck Trust

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many audited accounts she has seen for the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will instigate an inquiry into the accounts of the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust.

Mr. Sackville: Accounts for the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust's first year are not due to be audited until the summer of 1995. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will not see the accounts until the audit is complete.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions serious conditions were later discovered to have been misdiagnosed in the

Wansbeck and Cheviot maternity unit and the Northumberland health authority in each year since 1992.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Cheviot and Wansbeck national health service trust and Northumberland health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the trust and the vice-chairman of the authority, Mr. Roger Baker and Mr. David Wright, for details.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to provide additional funding for the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: National health service trusts receive no direct funding from the Department of Health. They derive their income principally from contracts with purchasers—health authorities and general practitioners fundholders—to provide health care.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received relating to financial irregularities at the Cheviot and Wansbeck trust; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the waiting list *(a)* for out-patient examinations and *(b)* for in-patient surgery in the Northumberland health authority and the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital.

Mr. Malone: Information on the waiting time for first out-patient appointments will be published shortly.

Information on waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment by national health service trust and non-trust hospital is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Forensic Psychiatry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, for each regional health authority, how many doctors have been trained each year for the last five years in forensic psychiatry; and how many qualified in forensic psychiatry are practising by region in the national health service.

Mr. Malone: The tables show the numbers of registrars, senior registrars and consultants in forensic psychiatry.

Table 1: Forensic psychiatry: numbers as at 30 September each year: senior registrars and registrars

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
England	31	28	46	40	40
Total for all regions listed below:	32	28	46	40	40
Northern	1	1	—	3	1
Yorkshire	2	—	1	2	2
Trent	1	—	1	1	—
East Anglia	1	—	2	2	2

Table 1: Forensic psychiatry: numbers as at 30 September each year: senior registrars and registrars

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
North West Thames	1	—	2	3	4
North East Thames	1	—	—	2	3
South East Thames	1	2	2	3	2
South West Thames	2	2	3	1	—
Wessex	1	2	3	1	2
Oxford	—	—	1	1	1
South Western	2	2	3	2	3
West Midlands	6	7	13	5	2
Mersey	—	—	—	—	—
North Western	2	2	3	4	2
SHAs	4	2	2	3	3
Special hospitals	7	8	10	7	13

Notes:

Some staff are counted in more than one region. Hence the total for all regions may exceed the corresponding figure for England.

There were slight undercounts in the censuses for 1990 and 1991. It is not known whether these affected the data for forensic psychiatry.

Forensic psychiatry: numbers as at 30 September each year: consultants

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
England	75	71	68	80	82
Total for all regions listed below:	77	74	71	83	85
Northern	2	2	2	2	1
Yorkshire	5	3	3	5	5
Trent	4	3	3	4	4
East Anglia	3	3	3	2	3
North West Thames	3	3	3	4	1
North East Thames	4	2	2	3	3
South East Thames	7	6	6	4	3
South West Thames	2	2	2	1	2
Wessex	2	2	2	1	2
Oxford	1	1	1	1	2
South Western	3	3	4	4	4
West Midlands	4	5	5	6	6
Mersey	3	5	3	4	3
North Western	4	4	5	5	5
SHAs	5	5	5	4	5
Special hospitals	25	25	22	33	36

Notes:

Some staff are counted in more than one region. Hence the total for all regions may exceed the corresponding figure for England.

There were slight undercounts in the censuses for 1990 and 1991. It is not known whether these affected the data for forensic psychiatry.

Heart and Lung Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each designated heart and lung transplant unit the numbers of *(a)* heart, *(b)* lung, single or double and *(c)* heart and lung transplants carried out in the calendar years 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Sackville: The information for England is shown in the table. The figures for 1994 are provisional. Responsibility for such provision in Scotland rests with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

	1993			*1994*		
Transplant	*Heart*	*Heart/Lung*	*Lung*	*Heart*	*Heart/Lung*	*Lung*
Freeman Hospital	35	3	29	46	4	20
Northern General Hospital	22	—	1	22	—	2
Papworth Hospital	44	16	20	49	21	20
Harefield Hospital	70	9	30	83	14	51
Great Ormond Street Hospital	9	5	—	12	5	—

Transplant	1993 Heart	1993 Heart/Lung	1993 Lung	1994 Heart	1994 Heart/Lung	1994 Lung
St. George's Hospital	45	—	—	37	—	2
Queen Elizabeth Hospital	26	1	—	21	6	1
Wythenshawe Hospital	29	2	16	26	3	21
Total	280	35	96	296	53	117

Figures provided by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority.

Health Trusts and Authorities

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the differences between *(a)* a health trust and *(b)* a district health authority (i) statutory and (ii) management accounts; and which accounts are used to assess the financial position of the trust or authority.

Mr. Sackville: Management accounts are produced during the financial year by trusts and health authorities for performance management purposes. They provide internal information based upon unaudited figures, including some estimates and forward forecasts. This internal management information is succeeded by the statutory annual accounts which are subject to full audit and are therefore not available until after the end of the year.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish by national health service trust for 1993–94 the expenses paid to the chairman.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the names of NHS trust chief executives who resigned or whose contracts were terminated in 1993–94 stating, in each case, the name of the trust involved and the amounts paid for loss of office.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between her departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Sackville: Next steps agency framework documents, copies of which are available in the Library, set out the relationship between Ministers and agencies and their respective responsibilities.

Maternity Units

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time mothers spend in maternity units in *(a)* the Northumberland health authority and *(b)* the Wansbeck and Cheviot hospital.

Mr. Sackville: In 1992–93, the latest year for which information is available, the average length of stay for mothers in maternity units was 4.3 days in both the Northumberland district health authority and the former Wansbeck and Cheviot unit.

Management Allowances

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will call for a report on the level of management allowance given to general practitioners in Sunderland who are *(a)* fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders.

Mr. Malone: No. Management allowances reimburse fundholding general practitioners for costs incurred in directly managing their funds and purchasing care on behalf of their patients.

Non-fundholders do not have such additional responsibilities and do not receive management allowances.

Bed Statistics

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what has been the change in the number of beds in Northumberland district health authority in each year since 1987;

(2) what were the numbers of beds available to the national health service in each since 1988 in *(a)* the Northumberland health authority, *(b)* the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital and *(c)* the Ashington hospital.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for 1987 are published in "Summary of KHO3 Pt. II Wards open overnight England, National, Regional and District Summaries for the financial year 1987/88"; figures for years since 1988 to March 1994 are published in "Bed availability for England". Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Dementia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total cost of providing health care services to support people with dementia and their carers; and what estimates her Department has made of future costs.

Mr. Bowis: Information is not collected in such a way that we can identify costs specifically for dementia services.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS research and development funds are spent on dementia care.

Mr. Bowis: The national health service funds a range of research and development work into dementia care. Detailed information on the amount and proportion spent is not available centrally.

Mattress Covers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking with respect to the use by national health service trusts of mattress covers which have antimony and phosphorous in the fire retardant material.

Mr. Sackville: The chief medical officer has set up an expert working group chaired by Lady Limerick to undertake a new investigation of the claims and hypotheses recently made which link these two chemicals

with cot deaths, and to report as soon as possible. The 1991 Turner report said such claims were unfounded. Further action will depend on the advice of the expert group.

Merit Awards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number and total cost of merit awards currently made to consultants for each health authority in England.

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of consultants in receipt of distinction awards employed by each health authority in England is shown in the table. Data on the total costs of these awards could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultants' Distinction Awards: Awards held by consultants employed by regional and district health authorities and by the London special health authorities

	Number
Northern and Yorkshire	
Northern and Yorkshire RHA	8
Northumberland HA	0
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	0
Sunderland HA	0
North Durham HA	0
South Durham HA	0
Tees HA	0
South of Tyne HA	0
North Cumbria HA	2
East Riding HA	2
United Health (Grimsby and Scunthorpe) HA	0
North Yorkshire HA	2
Bradford HA	1
West Yorkshire HA	0
Leeds HA	17
Wakefield HA	0
Trent	
Trent RHA	4
North Derbyshire HA	0
South Derbyshire HA	0
Leicestershire HA	3
Nottingham HA	2
Barnsley HA	0
Doncaster HA	0
Rotherham HA	0
Sheffield HA	9
North Nottinghamshire HA	0
Lincolnshire HA	4
Anglia and Oxford	
Anglia and Oxford RHA	11
North West Anglia HA	1
Huntingdon and Cambridge HA	0
Suffolk HA	1
East Norfolk HA	0
Bedfordshire HA	0
Berkshire HA	3
Buckinghamshire HA	1
Northamptonshire HA	2
Oxfordshire HA	8
North Thames	
North Thames RHA	14
Hertfordshire HA	0
Barnet HA	1
Hillingdon HA	0
Brent and Harrow HA	1
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	0
Kensington Chelsea and Westminister HA	2
North Essex HA	17

Consultants' Distinction Awards: Awards held by consultants employed by regional and district health authorities and by the London special health authorities

	Number
South Essex HA	0
Barking and Havering HA	0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	0
East London and The City HA	43
New River HA	2
Camden and Islington HA	4
South Thames	
South Thames RHA	7
Bromley HA	0
East Sussex HA	3
East Kent HA	1
West Kent HA	1
Bexley and Greenwich HA	0
South East London HA	4
East Surrey HA	1
Chichester HA	0
Mid Downs HA	1
Worthing HA	2
Croydon HA	2
North West Surrey HA	0
South West Surrey HA	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	19
Mid Surrey HA	3
Kingston and Richmond HA	0
South and West	
South West RHA	7
Dorset HA	2
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	1
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	0
North and Mid Hampshire HA	0
Wiltshire and Bath HA	1
Isle of Wight HA	0
Bristol and District HA	2
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	0
Exeter and North Devon HA	1
Plymouth and Torbay HA	2
Gloucestershire HA	0
Somerset HA	1
West Midlands	
West Midlands RHA	3
Herefordshire HA	0
Worcester and District HA	0
Shropshire HA	0
North Staffordshire HA	0
Coventry HA	0
Dudley HA	0
Sandwell HA	3
Solihull HA	8
Walsall HA	1
Wolverhampton HA	1
South Birmingham HA	110
North Worcestershire HA	0
South Staffordshire HA	1
Warwickshire HA	0
North Birmingham HA	1
North West	
North West RHA	12
Chester HA	0
South East Cheshire HA	0
North Cheshire HA	0
Liverpool HA	1
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	0
Sefton HA	1
Wirral HA	0
Stockpot HA	0
Wigan and Bolton HA	1
North West Lancashire HA	1
East Lancashire HA	0

Consultants' Distinction Awards: Awards held by consultants employed by regional and district health authorities and by the London special health authorities

	Number
South Lancashire HA	0
Bury and Rochdale HA	1
West Pennine HA	1
Manchester HA	2
Salford and Trafford HA	26
Morecambe Bay HA	1
London SHAs	
National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery	45
Eastman Dental Hospital	16

Mixed Wards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS beds are currently in mixed wards; and what proportion this is of the total.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Nursing Education

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to maintain records centrally by regional health authority on the number of entrants to initial pre-registration nursing education *(a)* by course of study and *(b)* by academic qualification; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Data on the number of entrants to initial pre-registration nursing education are collected by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. Copies of the board's annual report for 1993-94 are available in the Library.

Waiting Lists, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current waiting list for each specialty in the Northumberland health authority; and what is the number of people who have waited *(a)* for over one year and *(b)* for over two years in each speciality.

Mr. Malone: Information on waiting times by trust and district health authority is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", copies of which are available in the Library. The latest published data are for September 1994.

Consultants, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant posts in the Northumberland district health authority there are at present; and what was the figure in each year since 1989.

Mr. Malone: The numbers of consultant posts have up to now been collected either by region or teaching district. This is not a teaching district and therefore no figures are available at district level. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority, Mr. John Greetham, for details.

Midwives

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives in the Northumberland health authority are in the intensive midwifery training programme.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for Northumberland district health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the vice—chairman of the authority, Mr. David Wright, for details.

NHS Finance, London

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the figures for the deficit or surplus of each London NHS trust and district health authority at the end of the last financial year according to those trusts and authorities' management accounts.

Mr. Sackville: Management accounts information is unaudited information used for internal performance management purposes. As such, it is not suitable for publication.

Rural Community Hospitals

Mr Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to maintain records centrally on returns of hospital activity data under the classification of rural community hospitals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

Nurses, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects nursing clinical grading appeals in Northumberland health district to be completed.

Mr. Sackville: Over 60 per cent. of the outstanding appeals in the former Northern region have been resolved since last April. The four outstanding appeals in Northumberland will be cleared as soon as possible.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the full cost of implementing those sectors of the Disabled Persons (Services, Representation and Consultation) Act 1986 which are in force.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Cancer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently suffering from cancer in the United Kingdom; what is the projection for 2015; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *791*.

Hospital Death Rate Tables

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to ensure that publication of hospital death rate tables does not result in NHS trusts refusing to admit seriously ill patients.

Mr. Malone: The national health service treats, and will continue to treat, patients on the basis of clinical need.

Medical Records

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidelines ensuring that the rights of access by patients to their own medical records shall extend to the school and community health records as well as hospital and general practitioner records; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Access to Health Records Act 1990 gives individuals the right of access to health records compiled by or on behalf of health professionals in connection with their care. Records kept by the school health service or community health service are covered by the provisions of the Act. Guidelines issued in August 1991, HSG(91)6, apply equally to these records. Where the records are held on computer, the right of access is provided by the Data Protection Act 1984.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where she lists her priorities for in video fertilisation treatment within the NHS; and if she will make a statement on IVF treatment within the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) on 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *91–92*.

Edgware General Hospital

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she has received further representations from the public about the possible closure of Edgware general hospital since the new year; and if she will make a statement on the future outlook for this hospital.

Mr. Sackville: We have received a number of representations. Barnet health authority and Brent and Harrow health authority are considering the results of public consultation on proposals for the hospital.

Mobility Centres

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how she intends to continue the funding of accredited mobility centres whose funding from regional health authorities has ended.

Mr. Bowis: The main source of national health service funding is and will continue to be local health purchasers who place contracts for assessment. In some cases, regional health authorities have made grants to such centres under their medical innovations budget. The future of such budgets beyond the reorganisation of RHAs under the Health Authorities Bill anticipated for April 1996 is currently being considered by the national health service executive.

Toxocariasis

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are taken to *(a)* prevent and *(b)* deal with eye damage caused by toxocariasis; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health provides a grant to the charity Community Hygiene Concern, which produces information for the public on toxocariasis, and also supports the work of the Department of the Environment to encourage responsible dog ownership.

If patients with toxocariasis present early enough drug treatment may be useful. Eye damage caused by toxocariasis is treated on a case-by-case basis.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the individuals appointed by her Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Sackville: The Public Appointments Unit provides names of suitably qualified candidates for consideration for a wide range of appointments. Information on the source of names of individual appointees to public bodies could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nurse Inspectors

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms exist to monitor at national level the work of nurse inspectors operating under the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Mr. Bowis: None. The registration and inspection of nursing homes under the Registered Homes Act is wholly delegated to health authorities.

Accident and Emergency Provision, Liverpool

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present situation in respect of progress towards the restructuring of accident and emergency provision in NHS hospitals in Liverpool.

Mr. Sackville: This is a local matter. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. H. Tod, chairman of Liverpool health authority, to establish the latest position.

Lynfield Mount Hospital, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will instruct the Bradford community health trust to publish in full the recent report of the external review team on matters relating to the secure unit at Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford, with particular reference to the escape from the unit of Mr. Raymond Pemberton; if she will place a copy of the report in the Library; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: No. The report's 35 recommendations have been published by the Bradford community health national health service trust. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *127*.

Departmental Openness and Accountability

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways openness and accountability are promoted in her Department and the services for which she is responsible.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

National Health Service

accountability through Ministers to Parliament.

annual reports and audited accounts from health authorities and national health service trusts.

health authority meetings open to the public.

NHS trusts' annual public meetings.

summary business plans by NHS trusts.

reports by local directors of public health on health needs and services.

clear patients' rights and national and local standards under the patients charter, and reports on results.

power to patients through general practitioner fundholders to ensure more accountability of service providers.

annual plans and reports by GP fundholders.

first ever performance ("league") tables giving comparative information for the public on their hospitals and ambulance services.

codes of conduct and accountability for the members of NHS bodies.

audit and remuneration committees to strengthen the role of non-executive members of NHS bodies.

registers of members' interests.

external, independent scrutiny by the Audit Commission.

statutory obligations to consult on substantial changes to services.

consultation documents on major proposals, with background and options.

statutory rights for community health councils to be consulted on substantial changes to services and to obtain information.

published strategies and plans for the purchase of health services for local people.

public contracts between the purchasers and providers of health services, including the quantity and quality of services to be provided.

statutory rights of access to personal health information.

published information on complaints.

Further plans include a code of practice on openness in the NHS, now out for consultation, setting out the public's right to information except in clearly defined circumstances; an accountability framework for GP fundholders; new procedures for appointments to NHS bodies, including advertisements, independent sifting panels and published criteria; a response to the Wilson review on NHS complaints; and a new and expanded patients charter.

Social services

statutory obligation on local authorities to publish information on children's services

statutory obligation on local authorities to publish community care plans and reviews of day care for children

local inspection units with a lay element, and published reports

national framework for local community care charter issued

statutory rights of access to social work records

statutory requirement for complaints procedures

Social Services Inspectorate's national programme covering all local authorities in England, with reports published and accessible to the public

Department of Health

accountability of Ministers to Parliament

a comprehensive overview of priorities, progress, expenditure and activity in the annual departmental report

National health service annual report, containing more information on developments and performance

detailed financial information contained in estimates and appropriation accounts, scrutinised by the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee

annual report from the social services inspectorate on its activities and programme

annual report from the chief medical officer on the state of the public health

5,649 replies to parliamentary questions in 1993–94

over 84,000 letters dealt with in 1993, including more than 25,000 for ministerial reply

a commitment to make information available except in clearly defined circumstances under the code of practice on access to Government information

detailed quarterly, six-monthly and annual statistical information in bulletins and reports, including a comprehensive annual compendium on health and personal social services in England

accountability to select committees, including the Select Committee on Health, the Public Accounts Committee and the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

framework documents and published reports from the Medicines Control Agency, the Medical Devices Agency, the NHS Estates agency and the NHS Pensions agency; and reports and accounts from the youth treatment service

statements from all agencies adopting citizens charter principles

a charter for scheme members being produced by the NHS Pensions agency

NHS Estates agency accreditation for British standard 5750 on quality assurance and customer service

Health Education Budget

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was her Department's budget for health education in each of the last five years; and what is the projected budget for the next three years.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Expenditure on health education falls to a number of budgets. Apart from funding for the Health Education Authority in 1994–95—to date, £36,984,000—and expenditure on health education publicity campaigns run by the Department, there is other, unquantifiable, expenditure on a variety of services and programmes which involve elements of health education, run by health authorities, trusts and other agencies.

Insulin

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's assessment of the qualities and advantages of human and animal insulin, respectively.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The assessment of the qualities and advantages of human and animal insulin is a matter for the clinical judgment of individual doctors.

WALES

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many intensive care beds there are in each of the health trusts in Wales.

Mr. Richards: At 30 June 1994—the latest date for which information is available—the number of staffed beds allocated to intensive care was as follows:

	Number
NHS Trusts:	
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	9
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	3
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	6
Glan Clwyd General Hospital NHS Trust	6
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	7
Gwynedd Hospital NHS Trust	7
Llandough Hospital NHS Trust	5
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust	7
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	6
Pembrokeshire Trust	3
Swansea NHS Trust	9
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	6
Other Health Units:	
Merthyr/Cynon Health Unit	4
UHW/CRI Group of Hospitals	22
West Glamorgan East Health Unit	7

Source:
QSI return.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to provide the resources for more intensive care beds in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: It is for individual health authorities and hospitals to agree on its provision of intensive care beds in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Greenfield Bypass

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet Clwyd county council to discuss funding of the Greenfield bypass, A548; and if he will make a statement with regard to his view on a start date.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. His officials meet regularly with the county council to discuss potential transport grant schemes.

It is for Clwyd county council to take forward the scheme.

Dobshill Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of Dobshill hospital, near Buckley, Clwyd.

Mr. Richards: The future of Dobshill hospital is a matter for the Clwyd health authority and the Clwydian Community Care NHS trust at this stage.

Schools (Information Technology)

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to develop information technology in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: We have undertaken a substantial programme of investment in information technology in both primary and secondary schools. Under the grants for education support and training programme, it is estimated that £1.9 million will be spent in 1994–95, and expenditure of a similar amount is planned for 1995–96.

Developing a sound knowledge of information technology and its implications is an essential part of children's education. Information technology is, therefore, a compulsory element of the revised national curriculum for all pupils aged five to 14 in maintained schools in Wales. It will also be a common requirement, for all subjects, that pupils should be given opportunities, where appropriate, to develop and apply their information technology capability in their study of all national curriculum subjects.

North Wales Police Force

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has been given by the North Wales police force and by Gwynedd and Clwyd county councils concerning the reduction in the number of police officers in North Wales which will follow from the budget for 1995–96 which has been provided for the North Wales police force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Mr right hon. Friend the Under-Secretary met a deputation from the North Wales police authority on 20 December. The authority estimates that it will have to make a reduction of 60 officers in 1995–96 on the basis of the provisional police settlement. I am considering the representations made by the authority and I will announce my final settlement decisions at the end of January.

Community Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will increase the budget of the Clwydian community trust to enable it to meet its overall commitments with specific reference to the responsibilities it has for community care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The Clwydian community NHS trust secures its income through contracts negotiated with commissioning health authorities.

Meadowslea Hospital

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of Meadowslea hospital, Penyffordd, Clwyd.

Mr. Richards: The future of Meadowslea hospital is a matter for the Clwyd health authority and the Clwydian community care NHS trust at this stage.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Redwood: One. The Public Appointments Unit holds a register of candidates for appointment nationally. The Welsh Office maintains its own register of candidates for public appointment to which people interested in appointment to bodies in Wales may apply.

Trans-European Rail Network

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Welsh rail links are included in the proposed trans-European network; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The European Commission's proposal for a trans-European transport network, as currently drafted, includes the following railway lines:

Holyhead–Crewe

Aberystwyth–Shrewsbury–Wolverhampton–Birmingham

Fishguard–Cardiff–London

The Government have proposed to the Commission a number of additional rail lines. These include:

Clarbeston Road–Milford Haven

Whitland–Pembroke Dock

Newport–Hereford–Shrewsbury–Crewe

Cardiff–Birmingham

Local Government Code of Conduct

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the relevance for councils in Wales of the code of conduct for local government employees published by the Local Government Management Board.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is for individual local authorities to decide whether they wish to adopt the code of conduct for local government employees.

South America (Trade Links)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to encourage Welsh trade links with south American countries.

Mr. Redwood: The economies of south America are now potentially attractive markets for Wales-based companies, with Argentina and Chile providing a broad range of opportunities. The Welsh Office intends to organise a trade mission there in May this year.

Brynglass Tunnels Scheme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish details of the reasons for every delay in the work on the Brynglass tunnels scheme and the explanation of the hiatus planned between its completion and opening.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is commercial in confidence between the parties to the contract. However, main delays were caused by the discovery of contaminated fill at Glebelands, service diversions at the Harlequin and the collapse of a cofferdam in the River Usk.

The A4042 section of the scheme is expected to be opened to traffic in a few weeks' time. The contractor has advised that the remaining works should be completed in the summer of 1995.

Non-Christian Pupils

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the schools he has visited in the past year in which a substantial proportion of their pupils were from families of non-Christian faiths.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Lobbying Organisations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to eliminate the use of lobbying firms by local authorities and in support of all communications to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have made it clear to my department that if a local authority asks to meet me via a Member of Parliament, I or a Welsh Office Minister will usually see it. There is no need to employ a lobbying firm. I want local authorities to concentrate on providing services for their taxpayers.

A483 (Pool Quay)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish a speed limit on the A483 trunk road at Pool quay, Powys; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 12 December 1994]:* My Department has again considered a reduction in the national speed limit at Pool quay. It has been concluded that the effective way forward is to continue to try to reduce speeds by improving the driver's perception of the developed area. Additional signing and road markings have recently been provided but further traffic management measures are being considered.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Surplus Stocks

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made since the publication of Cmnd. 6003—"Membership of the European Community-Report on Renegotiation"—in discouraging the creation of surplus stocks and enacting measures to discourage surplus production of milk products and cereals; and what was the tonnage of surplus stocks in 1974 and 1993 together with the annual cost of storage and the losses incurred on their disposal for export or industrial use.

Mr. Jack: Since 1979, the common agriculture policy has seen a number of changes, including, in 1984, the introduction of milk quotas. The other most notable change was the 1992 CAP reform agreement, which was a major development in moving the CAP closer to the market and reducing dependence on intervention. The agreement included significant reductions in support prices for major commodities and other measures to cut excess production, such as a limit to the total arable area eligible for direct support, coupled with a requirement to set land aside, and livestock premium quotas.

Tables showing levels of all produce held in intervention within the EU, including cereals and milk products, are deposited in the Library of the House monthly, most recently on 5 December. The information currently held in the House Library goes back to January 1985. Figures for earlier years were not prepared on the same basis.

The budgetary cost of intervention in the cereals and milk sectors which would include storage costs and losses on resale, for the years 1974, EC9 and 1993, EC12 are:

	1974 mua	*1974 £ million*	*1993 mecu*	*1993 £ million*
Cereals	323.6	163.6	2,724	2,142
Milk products	342	168	294	231

Exchange rates:
1974: 1 ua = £0.491712
1993: 1 ecu = £0.78627

Telephone Dialling Codes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made as to the additional costs which will be incurred by his Department as a result of the changes in national telephone dialling codes next year; and how much this change will cost his Department in additional expenditure.

Mr. Jack: The amendments to our telephone exchanges required as a result of the code changes have been made by the maintainers free of charge with the exception of five small exchanges that required total expenditure of approximately £3,500. Changes will also be required to ancillary items such as stationery, signs and fax machines. No information is available centrally on the cost to change these items, but they are being managed within existing budgets.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has that the spread of bovine tuberculosis is caused by badgers.

Mrs. Browning: Experimental control areas in Dorset and Gloucestershire, set up in 1975, provided evidence of the causal link between infection in badgers, and cattle herds. After removal of the badgers, there were no further cattle TB herd breakdowns in these areas for many years. Two independent reports, by Lord Zuckerman in 1980 and Professor Dunnet in 1986, concluded from the evidence obtained under laboratory conditions at the Central Veterinary Laboratory and from the field that badgers can and do harbour bovine tuberculosis and represent a potential threat to cattle. All cattle tuberculosis breakdowns are the subject of detailed epidemiological investigation by MAFF veterinary staff. These show that badgers are implicated in at least three quarters of cattle herd tuberculosis breakdowns in south-west England.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many badgers he estimates have been culled as a result of bovine tuberculosis in each of the last three years *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Nottinghamshire.

Mrs. Browning: The number of badgers killed in Ministry removal operations as a result of bovine tuberculosis in England in the last three years is as follows:

1992: 1,054
1993: 1,094
1994: 1,674

None of these operations took place in Nottinghamshire.

Veal Products

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to require all veal products to be labelled according to the method of production.

Mrs. Browning: No. The food advisory committee considered the question of labelling relating to methods of production during a wide-ranging review of food labelling and advertising practices, which it conducted in 1990. The committee did not recommend imposing any requirements to indicate animal rearing methods on food labels and the Government have accepted this advice. This does not prevent the voluntary inclusion of such information, providing it is true and not misleading.

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leukosis; what was the figure at 31 October 1993, and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: The information on the number of animals under the age of 30 months confirmed as being infected with enzootic bovine leukosis is not available, but the number would be low as infection has been confined in a total of only 90 animals on 33 premises since October 1992, of which 29 animals were found on 10 premises since 31 October 1993. It is often not possible to classify young animals as either infected or not infected until they are at least two years of age, by which time many of the animals which might be suspected of being infected have been slaughtered.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Jack: Our officials regularly consult the public appointments unit for names of suitable, qualified candidates for public appointment. Of the appointments made by my right hon. Friend in the last year, 13 were made from names supplied by the unit.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he now has to prevent Albert Hall Farms from exporting calves.

Mrs. Browning: We have no such plans. The powers available to prevent the transport or further transport of animals can be applied in circumstances where breaches of the legislation are disclosed in respect of particular consignments.

DEFENCE

Redundancies

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table showing the cash sums

allocated for *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military redundancies in each service in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98; what additional annual costs will fall to his Department in each of those years as a result of accruing superannuation liability changes associated with the early payment of lump sum benefits and annual pension payments to redundant service personnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The costs of service redundancies and those civilian redundancy costs which fall to my Department will be met from within the planned defence budget totals announced on 29 November 1994. Those plans contain some £220,000,000 in 1995–96 and £310,000,000 in 1996-97, more in real terms—at 1993–94 prices—principally to meet the costs of service redundancies which I announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *870*. No additional costs will fall to the defence budget in the years in question to meet the costs associated with the early payment of lump sum benefits and annual pensions to redundant service personnel.

Aircraft (Falling Materials)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details of all incidents in the past three years in which stores, weaponry, equipment or other material have unintentionally fallen from military aircraft in flight.

Mr. Soames: Full details of all incidents could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Excluding inadvertent weapons releases inside range areas, however, the total number of incidents involving inadvertent releases of stores, weaponry, equipment and other material in the past three years is 310.

RAF Leuchars

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the visit of three Danish F16 aircraft to RAF Leuchars from 12 to 14 December 1993; which RAF unit hosted the exchange visit; how many sorties were flown by the aircraft on each of the days of their deployment; and how many of these were at low level.

Mr. Soames: The aircraft deployed to RAF Leuchars, which hosted the visit, to conduct low flying training. Following their arrival at the station on 12 December, no sorties were flown that day. Five sorties were flown on 13 December, none of which were booked at low level. The aircraft departed on 14 December and, as the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces made clear in his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *389*, to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), flew part of their sortie without authorisation within the United Kingdom low flying system. Details of that incident were passed to the Royal Danish air force for appropriate action.

Military Aircraft (Birds)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many collisions have occurred between military aircraft and birds within five miles of the wildfowl and wetlands trust site at Caerlaverock, Dumfries, within the last five years; what species of bird was involved in each incident; and what was the altitude at which each collision occurred.

Mr. Soames: Although my Department's computerised aircraft incident records do include details of all reported birdstrikes by service aircraft, they are not held in a form that would allow easy retrieval, and the information requested could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Harry Mills

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will de-classify and publish the report of the Deputy ARP Controller Newport on the death of Harry Mills aged 12 in Newport, Gwent, on 2 January 1943.

Mr. Soames: My Department does not hold a copy of this report.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the safety of the decontamination and re-use of all sites used during the 1939–45 war for the storage of and exercises involving chemical weapons; when each site was last inspected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: During world war two there were a large number of sites concerned with the development, production, storage and testing of chemical weapons. Sites which were subsequently disposed of were checked to ensure no residual chemical contamination was present. It has not been possible to identify when each of these sites was inspected, but there is no evidence to suggest that there have been any subsequent contamination problems. We are aware of our duty of care responsibilities and thus sites remaining in my Department's ownership are subject to review to ensure there is no risk to the public.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will de-classify and publish full details of all reports of wartime casualties of civilian and military personnel attributed to mustard gas and other chemical weapons poisoning.

Mr. Soames: My Department holds no central collation of information on such incidents. Medical records relating to individuals are at present withheld from the Public Record Office as medical in confidence.

Second World War Secret Documents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for all previously secret reports on Britain during the second world war that are now available for public inspection in the United States to be de-classified in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: In accordance with the initiatives set out in the White Paper on open government, Cm 2290, my Department, in common with other Government Departments, has been re-examining records closed for more than 30 years. To date, more than 6,500 such records have been released, most covering the events of the second world war. Not all the material now de-classified in the US has survived in British archives.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Freeman: My Department has not granted preferred carrier status to any airline.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Soames: Although the Cabinet Office's Public Appointments Unit may be consulted for appointments to a range of MOD or MOD sponsored public positions, nominations may also be made from a variety of other sources. Additionally, candidates are sought through various professional and group organisations. My Department does not maintain central records about the means by which individuals were nominated or identified for such appointments.

Crown Housing Trust

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the total cost to his Department of establishing the Crown housing trust to manage MOD service quarters; and if he will make a statement about its future;

(2) how many people are employed by the Crown housing trust; and what has been the total cost in salaries to its employees since its inception.

Mr. Soames: Work has been under way in my Department since 1991 on new arrangements for the married quarters estate, at a total cost to date of some £5 million. This figure includes salary costs, to the end of November 1994, of approximately £160,000 for eight staff initially recruited for a housing trust and now engaged on setting up the defence housing executive, as announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 17 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1*.

David Hart

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the possibility of conflict of interests arising by his employment of Mr. David Hart as his special adviser in relation to his Department's plans for married service quarters; whether Mr. Hart has played any role in the development of the plans for married service quarters or has seen them; and what interest Mr. Hart has shown in the purchase of married service quarters.

Mr. Freeman: Mr. David Hart, as special adviser to my right hon. Friend, is one of several independent advisers who have contributed to the development of plans for the married quarters estate. His involvement has been, and continues to be, very productive. The need to ensure that there is no conflict of interest in the involvement of advisers in the next phase of the privatisation of the married quarters estate is fully recognised; this will be subject to the provision of formal undertakings.

Vacant Dwellings

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to dispose of the vacant dwellings currently owned by his Department.

Mr. Soames: Not all vacant dwellings are surplus to our requirements. The majority are undergoing or awaiting major maintenance, held for future deployments, or form part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available for entitled service families. However, empty properties which are surplus to requirements are sold. Properties which are not surplus to long-term requirements but which are not needed immediately for service families are, wherever possible, leased to local authorities, housing associations or civilians.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for the implementation of the United Kingdom's obligations under article VI of the 1968 treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Soames: We are committed to work towards nuclear disarmament in the context of general and complete disarmament, and have played and continue to play an active role in a wide range of non-proliferation and arms control negotiations. We have also reduced our holdings of nuclear weapons, eliminating our surface maritime and ground tactical capability and substantially reducing our stockpile of nuclear free-fall bombs.

Electro-shock Batons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what stocks of electro-shock riot batons his Department possesses; and what tests his Department have conducted on electro-shock riot batons.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if electro-shock riot batons were part of the Al-Yamamah arms deal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No electronic shock weapons have been supplied under the Al-Yamamah programme.

Faslane

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether changes were made to the safety plans for the Faslane nuclear site following discovery of seismic problems; what was the total cost of these changes; and when they were carried out;

(2) what frequency his Department assumed when planning the Faslane nuclear site for earthquakes measuring 0.2 G or more horizontal ground acceleration;

(3) what steps his Department took to ensure that appropriate *(a)* seismic surveys and *(b)* geological structure surveys were conducted in the planning stage of the Faslane nuclear site;

(4) what technical changes were made to the shiplift facility for the Trident system at Faslane following lessons learnt from the Chernobyl nuclear reactor explosion; and what was the total cost of these changes;

(5) what is the maximum horizontal ground acceleration that the Faslane nuclear site is able to withstand from an earthquake.

Mr. Freeman: Safety plans for the Clyde submarine base, Faslane, are kept under continuous review and amended as necessary in the light of all relevant information. During the planning stage of the Trident

support facilities at Faslane, a number of geotechnical reports on the site were commissioned on behalf of the Ministry of Defence from distinguished academics and other experts. These included one specifically on geology and seismicity. Planning also drew on the British Geological Survey's national database of fault lines and seismic events. The support facilities were designed in accordance with the relevant national standard, namely, that a reactor plant must be capable of being shut down and maintained in a safety shut down condition following an earthquake of a severity with a probability of occurrence not exceeding one in 10,000 years. For Faslane the design peak horizontal ground acceleration of such an earthquake is 0.2 G. In the event, the Ministry of Defence achieved a more demanding criterion for the shiplift in the light of developments in United Kingdom civil practice which had followed the Chernobyl incident.

It is not possible to identify separately the financial effects of the changes in the design of facilities during planning and construction nor of past and prospective refinements to safety plans.

EMPLOYMENT

City Challenge

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the unemployment figures for each area which successfully bid for city challenge *(a)* at the time the bid was accepted and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on claimant unemployment in those local authority areas and wards which are covered by the city challenge scheme can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Redundancies (Walthamstow)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many redundancies were notified in Walthamstow in each of the past five years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* enforcement actions were taken by the Health and Safety Executive in each year from 1980 to 1994 against employers who have imposed on their employees excessive working hours or shift patterns in contravention of section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Oppenheim: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will review the policy of refusing travel claims for income support recipients who have applied for positions of less than one year in duration.

Miss Widdecombe: The rules of the travel-to-interview scheme have been reviewed recently and the Employment Service is at present testing changes to the scheme in its north-west region. One of the changes is a more flexible approach to the rule that the prospective job must be expected to last for more than a year. However, this relaxation does not include seasonal jobs, or very short-term temporary jobs.

If the test shows that the changes are effective and can be paid for within the resources available, we would hope to introduce the revised scheme nationally in the autumn.

Disabled People

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the Doncaster and Mexborough area were registered unemployed (i) at the last date for which figures are available and (ii) on the same date for each of the previous four years.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information on the number of disabled people claiming unemployment-related benefit is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Occupational Asthma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps his Department is taking following the findings of Professor Anthony Newman on the relationship between the amount of workplace exposure to respiratory sensitisers and the development of occupational asthma.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive was aware of the emerging findings of Professor Newman Taylor's research when it launched its "Breathe Freely" campaign last April. The campaign focuses on preventing occupational asthma by raising awareness of the dangers of respiratory sensitisers and reminds employers of their duty under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 to control exposure to these substances. The results of Professor Newman Taylor's research, which was jointly funded by HSE and the National Asthma Campaign, underline the message of the "Breathe Freely" campaign: controlling exposure to respiratory sensitisers will reduce the prevalence of occupational asthma.

Gas Explosions

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will commission a report on gas explosions since mid-December.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Executive has been investigating four separate incidents since mid-December 1994. Any lessons to be learned will be discussed as a matter of urgency with British Gas and will be more widely available under the terms of the Health and Safety Commission's policy of openness.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the percentages of youth training leavers *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in London obtaining full qualifications at NVQ levels, 1, 2, 3 and 4 or their equivalents; and what is the percentage obtaining no qualification for each of the years since 1990 for which data are available.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the following tables. Information on qualifications in Scotland is available only on a comparable basis up to 1992–93.

Highest NVQ equivalent gained whilst on YT
Table 1: 1990–91 all leavers

Per cent.

	Level 4	*Level 3*	*Level 2*	*Level 1*	*Scotvec*	*Other*	*Did not gain a qualification*
Great Britain	¹—	3	11	11	4	12	49
England and Wales	¹—	3	13	12	n/a	13	49
London	¹—	2	10	13	n/a	11	53

Table 2: 1991–92 all leavers

Per cent.

	Level 4	*Level 3*	*Level 2*	*Level 1*	*Scotvec*	*Other*	*Did not gain a qualification*
Great Britain	1	5	14	10	¹—	4	49
England and Wales	1	5	15	10	n/a	4	48
London	¹—	4	12	11	n/a	4	51

Table 3: 1992–93 all leavers

Per cent.

	Level 4	*Level 3*	*Level 2*	*Level 1*	*Scotvec*	*Other*	*Did not gain a qualification*
Great Britain	1	5	15	6	1	4	50
England and Wales	1	6	16	6	n/a	4	50
London	1	5	14	7	n/a	4	51

Table 4: April 1993 to August 1993 all leavers

Per cent.

	Level 4	*Level 3*	*Level 2*	*Level 1*	*Scotvec*	*Other*	*Did not gain a qualification*
England and Wales	2	8	20	6	n/a	3	44
London	1	5	17	8	n/a	3	49

Source:
YT national follow-up survey.
Notes:
n/a—not applicable
¹ less than 0.5 per cent.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of jobs gained and lost since 1972, as a result of Britain's membership of the EEC.

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 7 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *218*.

Northern Region

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the enhanced range of labour market help to those affected by the closures referred to by the Minister for Industry in his statement on 12 May 1993, *Official Report*, columns 801-809, as being provided by the Tyneside training and enterprise council and local employment service following the receivership of Swan Hunter Shipbuilders.

Mr. Paice: Tyneside training and enterprise council and the local employment service provided a range of additional job search assistance and training opportunities following the receivership of Swan Hunter Shipbuilders. This included:

advice and guidance on retraining, further and higher education, self-employment and resettlement assistance, leading to appropriate employment opportunities;

a training hotline between jobcentres and the TEC, a dedicated job shop and canvassing or employers;

a drive in respect of apprentices to secure the opportunity to finish their training programmes with a new employer, or exceptionally wholly within a TEC supported training centre;

immediate access to training courses, with particular emphasis on adapting and developing existing skills to suit alternative employment opportunities;

a partnership with North Tyneside city challenge to provide extra support for any "high cost" skills training for North Tyneside city challenge area residents;

the offer of training vouchers to each individual to help them secure jobs with new employers. Employers can then use the vouchers to implement customised training for these new recruits;

business skills training for those preparing for entry into self-employment.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the measures taken by his Department in the northern region in response to redundancies and closures in the shipbuilding, ship repair, offshore technology, heavy engineering, mining, utility and construction industries.

Miss Widdecombe: A range of measures has been introduced in response to redundancies and closures in north-east traditional industries. These have focused on helping those affected to find jobs and access training, further and higher education opportunities and, in appropriate cases, enter self-employment.

Tyneside training and enterprise council and the Employment Service have worked closely with local authorities, Tyne and Wear development corporation, further and higher education institutions and local employers in developing and implementing the measures.

The measures cover:

advice and guidance about employment opportunities, training opportunities and further and higher education opportunities;

efforts by ES to build up job banks and find vacancies for redundant workers;

provision of additional training opportunities: additional funds have been allocated to Swan Hunter and coal closures;

further and higher education institutions have responded readily to requests for information from redundant workers.

Tyne and Wear development corporation and local city challenge companies have also been involved in the creation of new opportunities for redundant workers. In the wider context of the Government office for the north-east, the Employment Department works closely with the Department of the Environment and the Department of Trade and Industry in ensuring that the needs of redundant work people are taken into account.

In addition to the above specific measures, efforts have been made to ensure that people affected by redundancies have ready access to the existing range of TEC and ES services. In particular, arrangements have been made to ensure the speedy processing of claims for unemployment benefit and advice on benefit entitlements and the normal eligibility conditions for access to training for work have been waived for redundant employees.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what special initiatives he has undertaken to respond to high levels of male unemployment in Newcastle, East and Wallsend following the closure of Swan Hunter and further redundancies at NEI Parsons.

Miss Widdecombe: Following the receivership of Swan Hunter, Tyneside training and enterprise council and the local employment service have provided a range of additional job search assistance and training opportunities:

advice and guidance on retraining, further and higher education, self-employment and resettlement assistance leading to appropriate employment opportunities;

a training hotline between jobcentres and the TEC, a dedicated job shop and canvassing of employers;

a drive in respect of apprenticeships to secure the opportunity to finish their training programmes with a new employer, or exceptionally wholly within a TEC supported training centre;

immediate access to training courses, with particular emphasis on adapting and developing existing skills to suit alternative employment opportunities;

a partnership with North Tyneside city challenge to provide extra support for any "high cost" skills training for North Tyneside city challenge area residents;

the offer of training vouchers to each individual to help them secure jobs with new employers. Employers can then use these vouchers to implement customised training for these new recruits;

business skills training for those preparing for entry into self-employment.

Following the announcement of the redundancies at NEI Parsons, Tyneside TEC and the local ES have given those people affected immediate eligibility to their range of job search assistance and training opportunities.

Unemployment

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in the Blyth Valley constituency, for each year since 1988, had been unemployed *(a)* for less than six months, *(b)* for six months to one year, *(c)* for one year to two years and *(d)* for over two years.

Mr. Oppenheim: Unadjusted claimant unemployment statistics by duration are available for the months of January, April, July and October and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people are currently seeking work but receive no unemployment benefit because of the length of their period of unemployment, and no social security payments because of the income of a spouse or partner in work.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 17 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of unemployed people who are currently seeking work, but have exhausted their entitlement to unemployment benefit (UB) and who do not receive social security payments because of the income of a spouse or partner in work.

Unfortunately this information is not fully available.

There are 641,000 people who are currently seeking work and have exhausted their entitlements to UB, but continue to sign at an Employment Service (ES) local office. While most clients registered with the ES would be entitled to and in receipt of some form of social security payment such as Housing benefit, family credit or National Insurance contributions credits, 97,099 of the above figure were not receiving any payment in respect of Income Support.

Social security data are not held on the reasons why a person does not receive an income related benefit so I am afraid I am unable to be more helpful.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of unemployment in each year since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: Unemployment statistics on both the claimant count basis and on the internationally recognised standard definition of the International Labour Organisation can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the current *(a)* unemployment rate and *(b)* number of persons unemployed among black people under 25 years of age in (i) London and (ii) Tottenham, in each case breaking the total rate down by gender;

(2) what is the current *(a)* unemployment rate and *(b)* number of persons unemployed among black people in (i) London and (ii) Tottenham, in each case breaking the total down by gender.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The following table gives the latest information available from the labour force survey:

ILO unemployed people in London from the black ethnic group summer 1994 (not seasonally adjusted)

	All persons	*Men*	*Women*
ILO unemployment rate (per cent.)	28	34	22
Numbers unemployed (000s)	72	46	26
Of which aged 16–24			
ILO unemployment rate (per cent.)	48	62	[1]
Numbers unemployed (000s)	21	15	[1]

[1] Estimates below 10,000, therefore not shown.

Training

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage of those leaving youth training schemes who progressed to *(a)* full-time work, *(b)* part-time work, *(c)* self-employment, *(d)* further education and training and *(e)* unemployment, in Southampton, Itchen, in Southampton and in Hampshire in each of the last five years.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Claimant unemployment statistics by duration are only available, only on the unadjusted basis and for the months of January, April, July and October.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what are the results of the youth training leavers survey for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the period December 1992 to January 1994, for all leavers and separately for male and female, for each ethnic group and for those with a disability or health problem, the number and proportion of trainees who six months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a jobclub and *(k)* doing something else;

(2) what are the results from the training for work leavers survey for the period December 1992 to January 1994 for each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise company area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of leavers who had *(a)* been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification and *(d)* were awaiting their results; and what is the number and proportion of training for work leavers who, six months after leaving, were (i) in a full-time job with their work experience employer, (ii) in a full-time job with another employer, (iii) employed in their own business, (iv) in a part-time job, (v) in voluntary work, (vi) on another Government training programme, (vii) on a full-time education or training course, (viii) unemployed and claiming benefit, (ix) unemployed and not claiming benefit, (x) in a jobclub and (xi) doing something else, and the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan;

(3) what are the results of the youth training leavers survey for the period December 1992 to January 1994 for each training and enterprise area in England and Wales and each local enterprise council area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of youth training leavers who were *(a)* in full-time work with the same employer, *(b)* in full-time work with a different employer, *(c)* in part-time work, *(d)* on a full-time course at a college/training centre, *(e)* on another youth training scheme, *(f)* doing something else, *(g)* who were unemployed and *(h)* who had obtained a vocational qualification; and what were *(i)* the number of questionnaires issued, (ii) the usable percentage response rate and (iii) the percentage or respondents who were early leavers;

(4) what are the results of the training for work leavers survey for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, for the period between December 1992 and January 1994, for all leavers and separately for male and female, for each ethnic group, and for those with a disability or health problem, the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had *(a)* been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification and *(d)* were awaiting their results; and what was the number and proportion of training for work leavers who six months after leaving were (i) in a full-time job with their work experience employer, (ii) in a full-time job with another employer, (iii) employed in their own business, (iv) in a part-time job, (v) in voluntary work, (iv) on another Government training programme, (vii) on a full-time education or training course, (viii) unemployed and claiming benefit, (ix) unemployed and not claiming benefit, (x) in a jobclub and (xi) doing something else, and the number and proportion of training for work leavers who had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 8 December 1994]:* I have recently written to the hon. Member and placed a copy of my reply in the Library.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1994, 23 individuals who were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit were appointed to the public bodies which are the responsibility of the Employment Department group.

Minimum Wage

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what independent evidence is available which examines the employment effects of the minimum wage.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* There is a large body of evidence which examines the effects of minimum wages on employment. This includes most recently the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's jobs study, the International Monetary Fund's world economic outlook, and the European Commission's White Paper on competitiveness.

Details of earlier studies and reports were given in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), on 4 November 1992, *Official Report,* column *299.*

SCOTLAND

Scottish Universities

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the number of students attending Scottish universities in the academic year 1994–95; and if he will give the figures for attendance at the same institutions in 1984–85 and 1989–90.

Mr. Lang: Information for 1994–95 is not yet available. Figures for universities alone would not be directly comparable because five higher education institutions in Scotland have been awarded university title since 1992.

For the other academic years requested and for 1993–94, the numbers of students undertaking higher education courses in higher education institutions in Scotland, by mode of study, are as follows:

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
1984–85	71,030	13,333	84,363
1989–90	81,496	17,043	98,539
1993–94	112,167	20,306	132,473

Sea Freight Subsidies

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the 1994 KPMG report on sea freight subsidies to the Scottish islands.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: After full and careful consideration, my right hon. Friend concluded that as the report was commissioned to inform consideration of policy options by Government and contains a considerable amount of commercial confidential information, it would not be appropriate to publish it.

Housing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many homeless applications to local authorities in Scotland there were in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The most recent information on homelessness applications for 1992–93 is published in statistical bulletin HSG/1994/3. The 1978–79 figure was published in the "Scottish Housing Statistics" No. 6. Copies of both can be obtained from the House Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what were the levels of *(a)* new build starts and *(b)* new build completions by (i) Scottish local authorities, (ii) new towns and (iii) Scottish Special Housing Association-Scottish Homes in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) what were the levels of new build starts and completions by housing associations and co-operatives in Scotland in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The most recent information is published in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin HSG/1994/9. The 1978 figures were published in "Scottish Housing Statistics". Copies of both can be obtained from the House Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the levels of Government financial support for housing associations and co-operatives in 1978 and in the latest year, expressed in 1994–95 prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The levels of Government financial support to housing associations and co-operatives in 1978–79 and 1993–4, expressed in 1994–95 prices, were £91.9 million and £268.3 million respectively.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* new town and *(c)* Scottish Special Housing Association dwellings in Scotland in 1978, and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The most recent information is published in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin HSG/1994/9. The 1978–79 figures were published in the "Scottish Housing Statistics" No. 6. Copies of both can be obtained from the House Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the total capital spend by *(a)* Scottish local authorities, *(b)* new towns and *(c)* Scottish Special Housing Association-Scottish Homes was (i) new build and (ii) modernisation in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information for new towns and SSHA-Scottish Homes is contained in the tables. Figures for capital expenditure by local authorities on new build and modernisations in 1978–79 and 1993–94 are published annually in "Scottish Local Government Finance Statistics" which is available in the Library of the House.

Table 1: (New Towns)

	New build Per cent.	*Modernisation Per cent.*
1978–1979	Unavailable	Unavailable
1993–1994	48	52

Table 2: (SSHA—Scottish Homes)[1]

	New Build Per cent.	*Modernisation Per cent.*
1978–79	68.5	31.5
1993–94	—	100

[1] Own stock expenditure only.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the total capital spend and *(b)* the total revenue spend on local authority, new town and Scottish Special Housing Association housing in Scotland in 1978 and in the latest year, expressed in 1994–95 prices; and how much of the total revenue spend in each year was financed by direct central Government grant.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is set out in the following table. Comparable information on local authority revenue expenditure in 1978–79 was not readily available and I shall write to the hon. Member.

The reduction in revenue and capital expenditure between 1978–79 and 1993–94 largely reflects the substantial reduction in size of the public sector housing stock. The reduction in central Government grant is in line with the policy of moving away from indiscriminate general subsidies and targeting tenants in greatest need through the housing benefit system. The expenditure attributed to Scottish Homes is on its own stock and excludes support for housing associations.

	Local Authority		*SSHA/Scottish homes*		*New Towns*	
	1978–79 £ million	*1993–94 £ million*	*1978–79 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1978–79 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*
Revenue Expenditure	—	1,064.0	156.0	89.5	142.6	70.8
Capital Expenditure	683.3	580.4	94.6	51.7	99.2	35.3
Central Government Grants	451.2	36.6	79.9	Nil	105.1	21.7

All figures are expressed in 1994–95 prices.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the total number of residential property sales in Scotland for each of the complete years since 1982–83 indicating for each year how many were as a result of public sector tenants exercising their right to buy.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Statistical information is not held centrally on residential property transactions in Scotland.

School Inspectors

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if all inspectors of schools have personal, practical experience of teaching in the sector and subjects they are inspecting.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Posts as Her Majesty's inspectors of schools are open to applicants who have distinguished service and occupied senior posts in education or who bring relevant experience gained elsewhere which can be applied within education. All Her Majesty's inspectors currently inspecting schools, colleges of further education and community education services have appropriate personal and practical experience relevant to the sectors and subjects they inspect. An extensive programme of staff development allows updating and extension of their expertise and experience across sectors.

Homelessness

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to outline the Government's proposals on homelessness following the responses to the consultation paper "Tackling Homelessness", and when he intends to resume the planned consultation exercise on amending the 1991 code of guidance on homelessness.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are still considering the nearly 160 responses received to "Tackling Homelessness", and we will announce our decisions in due course. A revised draft code of guidance on homelessness, taking account of these decisions, will be issued for comment later this year.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many emergency admissions were recorded for each health board for the last five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the following table.

NHSIS—Emergency Hospital Admission[1] *by Health Board Area of Treatment; Years ending 31 March 1990–1994*

Health board area of treatment	*Discharge in Year ending 31 March*				
	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*[2]
Argyll and Clyde	29,507	30,124	31,021	32,497	33,864
Ayrshire and Arran	21,949	22,653	24,571	26,617	28,881
Borders	7,188	7,614	8,099	8,351	8,534
Dumfries and Galloway	9,350	10,538	10,773	10,933	11,317
Fife	18,041	18,347	19,164	19,310	19,937
Forth Valley	16,316	17,790	18,242	19,255	20,395
Grampian	36,383	38,769	38,825	39,309	40,387
Greater Glasgow	75,624	78,661	79,312	89,012	96,772
Highland	14,944	14,839	15,782	17,027	14,444

NHSIS—Emergency Hospital Admission[1] by Health Board Area of Treatment; Years ending 31 March 1990–1994

Health board area of treatment	*Discharge in Year ending 31 March*				
	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994[2]*
Larnarkshire	36,114	37,224	38,306	39,566	41,237
Lothian	57,648	58,934	60,638	63,428	63,884
Orkney	1,026	1,160	1,158	1,175	1,204
Shetland	1,301	1,324	1,190	1,221	1,525
Tayside	34,237	34,778	34,942	35,201	37,692
Western Isles	1,988	1,927	2,102	2,127	2,476
Scotland	361,616	374,682	384,125	405,029	425,549

Notes:
[1] Discharges from non-obstetric and non-psychiatric specialities. Excludes patients transferred between hospitals, specialities or consultants.
[2] Provisional
Source: SMRI
Ref: Unit2/95014
Date: 13 December 1995

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *336*, what percentage of total admissions was represented by emergency hospital admissions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table below shows emergency admissions as a percentage of total in-patient admissions for Scotland for the calendar years 1989 to 1993.

1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
48.8	49.5	50.3	50.4	51.6

Supermarket, Anstruther

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 26 October, *Official Report*, columns *724–25*, when he now expects to announce his decision in the public local inquiry into the provision of a supermarket in Anstruther.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend expects to announce his decision by the end of this month.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the Public Appointments Unit.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office maintains its own public appointments list and therefore makes limited use of names from the Public Appointments Unit. The Scottish Office public appointments list is used as a source of names of suitably qualified candidates for consideration for a wide range of appointments which I make. From time to time the Public Appointments Unit passes names to the Scottish Office for the public appointments list, and vice versa. No central records are kept of the source of names of those who are appointed to public bodies.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, columns *336–37*, if he will now publish information, for 1993–94 on general practitioner fundholders' savings.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested relates to GP fundholder savings which are retained by the health board on the fundholder's behalf to be used for the benefit of patients. These figures are available only for those years for which audited health board accounts have been completed. The audited accounts for 1993–94 have still not been finalised but it is estimated that savings will be about 4 per cent.

NHS Helpline

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the distinction between an interactive and non-interactive phone call made to the NHS helpline; how many calls were made to it in each month since 25 October 1994; and what were the costs of administering and operating the helpline since his parliamentary answer of 26 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *727*.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Interactive calls are those which are answered by the NHS helpline and information is provided by the adviser about the NHS in Scotland. Non-interactive calls are those which are hoax calls; those which are from people who remain silent when put through to the adviser; or those who have dialled the wrong number.

Expenditure on administering and operating the NHS helpline between 25 October and 16 January totals £61,987.50. This includes additional resources totalling £16,000 in order to extend the hours of operation of the helpline and the number of telephone lines available to meet public demand for information during the measles-rubella immunisation campaign. The number of calls, both interactive and non-interactive, each month since 25 October 1994 is as follows:

Date	*Number*
26 October–18 November	5,066
19 November–16 December	2,431
17 December–12 January	1,080
Total	8,577

Ophthalmic Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which health boards in Scotland operate remote area schemes under the General Ophthalmic Services Regulations; when these services were introduced in these areas; what was the cost of

providing this service in the health board areas in each financial year for each health board; which areas are covered by the remote area schemes; what are the numbers of opticians employed by each health board to provide this remote area service; and how many patients are seen as part of these schemes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Provisions permitting the operation of remote area schemes within general ophthalmic services were introduced in 1975. Health boards can apply to the Secretary of State to operate a scheme in any area where this is required to meet the needs of residents. Under such schemes opticians may be reimbursed for their expenses incurred in travelling to remote locations to provide general ophthalmic services. Information about current schemes for the last three financial years is in the table.

General Ophthalmic Services: Remote areas schemes

	Health Boards				
Date of introduction	*Argyll and Clyde 1976*	*Highland 1976*	*Orkney 1989*	*Shetland 1976*	*Western Isles 1976*
1991–92					
Cost[1]	£2,764	£1,104	£1,142	—	—
No. of Opticians	3	1	1	[3]n\a	n\a
No. of Patients seen[2]	293	142	191	—	—
1992–93					
Cost	£2,375	£862	£949	—	—
No. of Opticians	3	1	1	n\a	n\a
No. of Patients seen	291	98	164	—	—
1993–94					
Cost	£2,405	£878	£700	[4]—	£1,849
No. of Opticians	2	1	1	1	1
No. of Patients seen	295	92	151	21	135

[1] Cost includes the expenses of the optician but does not include the cost of sight tests performed as vouchers dispensed.
[2] The same patient may be counted more than once if he/she was seen on more than one occasion.
[3] Information not readily available: could only be provided at excessive cost.
[4] No claim for expenses made by optician.

Housing Associations

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money each development corporation in Scotland has spent on the establishment of housing associations within their areas; and if he will list these associations and the amounts of money received.

Mr. Stewart: Expenditure up to 31 December 1994 is set out in the following table.

Development Corporation	*Housing Association*	*Amount £*
Cumbernauld	Abronhill Housing Association	10,500
East Kilbride	East Kilbride and District Housing Association	64,923
Glenrothes	Glenrothes Community Housing Association	25,782
Irvine	Irvine Housing Association	[1]301,000
Livingston	Almond Housing Association	62,782

[1] Irvine Development Corporation has seconded two staff to Irvine Housing Association and their costs are included. Scottish Homes is expected to make a contribution towards the costs of setting up the association after the deduction of the costs of the secondments.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many properties in each development corporation in Scotland have been transferred to housing associations as a result of *(a)* trickle transfer and *(b)* lease of new build properties since the inception of this policy.

Mr. Stewart: As at 31 December 1994, Livingston development corporation had transferred 63 vacant properties to housing associations under trickle transfer. No other corporations have transferred properties under trickle transfer and no corporations have transferred properties following the lease of new build.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what procedure exists for the long-term transfer of housing to the housing associations within each of the development corporation areas which currently lease these properties.

Mr. Stewart: The only leasing arrangement is between Irvine housing association and Irvine development corporation. The association has made an offer to purchase 160 of the 183 homes it presently has on lease. This offer is being considered by the corporation.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial agreement has been reached between Irvine development corporation and the Irvine housing association as regards the properties leased to it by the Irvine development corporation.

Mr. Stewart: The terms of the agreement require Irvine housing association to collect the rents for Irvine development corporation.

The association recovers separately from the corporation the costs it incurs in managing and maintaining the homes.

Royal Visits

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing each royal visit to Scotland since 1984, giving details of the *(a)* date, *(b)* location, *(c)* purpose and *(d)* participating Scottish Office Minister or Ministers.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Where possible, I or one of my ministerial colleagues accompanies, Her Majesty the Queen as Minister in attendance when she is carrying out public engagements in Scotland. Members of the royal family are conscious of the demands on Ministers and it has been the practice

for many years that Ministers are not, as a matter of course, in attendance on all visits. Ministers do not normally accompany other members of the royal family on visits to Scotland.

The Scottish Office information directorate acts on behalf of the press secretary to Her Majesty the Queen in making media arrangements for visits to Scotland by Her Majesty the Queen and immediate members of the royal family and, in this capacity, is present on such visits.

While the date and location of visits by Her Majesty the Queen and immediate members of the royal family are available, no central records are held as to the purpose of a visit or whether or not a Minister was present. The available details are being extracted and will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Scottish Office *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants accompanied His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales on his visit to Strathclyde flood sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Representatives of the Scottish Office information directorate assisted with the media arrangements during the visit by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to the flood sites.

The answer to a question about ministerial attendance at royal visits, which I gave to the hon. Member today, explains the practice followed for many years. On this occasion, no Minister was present.

Flooding, Strathclyde

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on how the Bellwin formula will apply to *(a)* Renfrew district council and *(b)* Strathclyde regional council in relation to the floods in December 1994; what will be the trigger levels; what is his latest estimate of the total relevant costs in relation to the formula and the amount likely to be payable to each authority by his Department; what these amounts will cover; and what these amounts will exclude;

(2) in what ways the Bellwin scheme might be utilised to *(a)* defray the costs of repairing and/or reinstating housing stock owned by local authorities, *(b)* defray the costs of repairing and/or reinstating housing stock owned by housing associations, *(c)* defray costs of repairing and/or reinstating houses owned by individual owner-occupiers and *(d)* pay the costs of replacing houses which are deemed to be technically or economically unviable.

(3) what is his latest estimate of the direct costs of the flooding in December 1994 to *(a)* the Scottish Office, *(b)* Strathclyde regional council, *(c)* Renfrew district council, *(d)* affected tenants and *(e)* affected owner-occupiers; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he will detail the expenditure his Department has committed to dealing with the problems created by the floods of December 1994, excluding additional borrowing consent for local authorities and moneys payable through the application of the Bellwin formula; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* Under the Bellwin scheme, each authority will receive grant at 85 per cent. of all eligible expenditure above its threshold. The threshold for Renfrew district council is £46,490 and for Strathclyde regional council £3,591,706. I do not yet have sufficient information from the authorities to estimate what may eventually be payable. However, all eligible expenditure above the thresholds will qualify for support. My officials are in contact with those authorities, but I do not want to press them for estimates before they are ready and while their priority must be to deal with the remaining effects of the flooding. The scheme on this occasion gives authorities until 31 May this year to prepare and submit their claims.

In order to be eligible for grant, expenditure must be incurred by a local authority in providing relief and carrying out immediate works to safeguard life or property or prevent suffering or severe inconvenience to affected communities. Expenditure by local authorities on repairing their own housing stock could be eligible for grant in as much as it met these criteria, but expenditure on reinstating stock would seem less likely to be so. The cost of longer-term repair and restoration of local authority housing stock, and the cost of constructing new houses to replace any houses made permanently unusable, would be of a capital nature and therefore not eligible for grant under the Bellwin scheme. Under the scheme, grant is payable only to local authorities, and therefore costs incurred by housing associations and individual owner-occupiers would not be eligible for grant.

The direct costs of the flooding to the Scottish Office will be those arising from Government support under the Bellwin scheme for the expenditure incurred by local authorities. Strathclyde regional council has given me a preliminary estimate of £10 million for the costs of emergency action, including around £4 million for damage to the rail network. The regional council's capital costs falling in 1994–95 are estimated to be £1.365 million, for which I have already issued a supplementary allocation. I have said that I am prepared to consider further requests from the council for capital allocations arising from the flooding and if necessary will take these into account in setting the council's allocation in 1995–96. The Scottish Office is presently awaiting Renfrew district council's assessment of the extent of the damage to the housing stock, both public and private sector, and to other council property, and the costs likely to be involved in repair works.

Excluding the additional housing and non-housing capital allocations which have to date been made available to the local authorities affected, of some £100,000 and £1,365,000 respectively, and the Government's open-ended commitment to 85 per cent. grants under the Bellwin scheme, the other expenditure so far committed by the Scottish Office is £10,000 which is to be paid to the Clyde River Purification Board to help meet the costs of a hydrological study into the flooding. The Scottish Office is prepared to support other joint studies into the flooding. Should Strathclyde regional council, as the flood prevention authority, decide in the light of that study, or following its general consideration of the issues arising from the flooding, to carry out flood prevention schemes, grant of 50 per cent. will be payable on the cost of any such schemes which may be submitted to and approved by the Secretary of State.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was *(a)* the date and *(b)* the purpose of each visit by a Scottish Office Minister to the areas in Strathclyde which suffered flooding in December 1994; what were the main issues arising from each of these

visits; what specific action followed each visit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on his visit to *(a)* the Park avenue and *(b)* the Collier street area of Johnstone following the recent flooding;

(3) if he will make a statement on his visit, and those of his ministerial colleagues, the hon. Members for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), to the Stockholm crescent and Barterholm-Thrushcraigs areas of Paisley following the recent floodings.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* I visited areas affected by flooding on 12 December and my right hon. Friend made visits to affected areas in Irvine on 24 December, Kirkintilloch on 26 December and Paisley on 27 December, accompanied by the local Members of Parliament.

The purpose of these visits was to convey our sympathy, and that of the Government, to those who had suffered loss and disruption of their lives, to express our thanks to the members of the emergency services and others, and to assess how the Government could help. As a result, we instructed our officials to ensure that all possible sources of assistance were made available to the councils involved and to explore various related matters.

My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for education and housing later visited Renfrew district council on 6 January to see for himself the areas of local authority housing which had been most affected by the recent flooding in advance of making decisions concerning local authority housing capital allocations for 1995–96 in the next few weeks. He had a useful discussion with the council and we await its further assessment of the repair costs and implications for its housing programme. My hon. Friend confirmed that the Government would look sympathetically at the council's case for additional housing capital resources in 1995–96 to tackle flood damage.

Strathclyde regional council will also wish to review its flood prevention policy. Developers and planners will also wish to give careful consideration to flood risks for new developments. Scottish Office Environment Department officials are currently working on, as a matter of priority, a new national planning policy guideline on planning and flooding for publication by the spring.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing, in descending order of severity, the worst floods recorded in Scotland in terms of *(a)* average depth, *(b)* greatest depth and *(c)* the number of houses affected since 1965.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* This information is not held centrally. However, the January 1993 Tay floods and the recent floods in west central Scotland were more extreme than any previous floods in the period of record. The return period of both of these flood events is estimated at more than 100 years on the major rivers, and possibly 200 years on the Clyde.

In the 1993 Tay floods, about 1,500 houses were inundated, over 1,100 in North Muirton, while in December 1994, 450 houses were inundated in Strathclyde. The total number of houses suffering damage was much greater in both events, some 3,500 in the recent flooding.

Previous major flooding events affected mainly agricultural land with few houses being flooded. Nevertheless, there have been many cases of localised flooding of housing in areas such as Langside on the White Cart water and adjoining the Brock burn.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the total number of households in each relevant parliamentary constituency which were affected by flood damage in December 1994; which of these *(a)* remained partially habitable, *(b)* were uninhabitable for two days or less, *(c)* were uninhabitable for more than two days but less than two weeks and *(d)* were uninhabitable for more than two weeks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The table sets out the information in the form requested, and is based on provisional information provided by the local authorities concerned. In some cases, particularly Glasgow, the figures include houses which remained habitable but required some repairs attributable to flood damage. Where the information was not available on a parliamentary constituency basis, the relevant district council area has been used.

Households affected by floods damage—December 1994

			Uninhabitable		
		(a)	*(b)*	*(c)*	*(c)*
	Total	*Remaining partially habitable*	*2 days or less*	*> 2 days but < 2 weeks*	*> 2 weeks*
Renfrew District					
Paisley North constituency	177	nil	47	59	71
Paisley South constituency	102	nil	nil	nil	102
West Renfrew/Inverclyde constituency	54	nil	53	nil	1
Eastwood constituency	1	nil	nil	nil	1
Strathkelvin District[1]	255	nil	10	6	4
Kilmarnock and Loudoun District	19	7	5	5	2
Cunninghame District	29	13	nil	nil	16

[1] Breakdown in categories *(a)–(d)* is available for local authority stock only.

1. In Glasgow and Falkirk districts some houses required repair but remained habitable throughout. The figure for Glasgow was 2,800. Most of these were not affected by flooding, and 32 were uninhabitable for between 2 days and 2 weeks and 23 for over 2 weeks. The figure for Falkirk was 17. None of these houses was uninhabitable.

NHS Redundancy Payments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what have been the costs of redundancy payments to NHS staff in each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally in Scotland.

Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the hon. Member for Paisley, South to discuss the provisions of the Natural Disasters (Scotland) Bill to *(a)* avert natural disasters including floods and *(b)* assist victims of such disasters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* I will be happy to meet the hon. Member, and I have asked for this to be arranged as soon as possible.

Hospital Closures

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *951*, what information is collected from health boards by his Office regarding hospital closures.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The Scottish Office receives information from health boards on which hospitals have closed. My reply of 19 December on this subject refers to that subject.

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the operation of the assisted places scheme in ensuring the continued operation of the independent schools sector.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The aims of the assisted places scheme are to enable children to attend independent schools which would otherwise be beyond their parents' financial circumstances and to widen parental choice. The scheme is not intended as a means of providing financial assistance to the independent schools sector. Currently, some 3,000 children receive assistance under the scheme. An independent survey report, published in 1992, provided clear evidence that it was meeting its objectives.

Manual Handling Operations

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* improvement notices, *(b)* prohibition notices and *(c)* prosecutions have been issued by the Health and Safety Executive to NHS trusts in Scotland in relation to breaches of the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 since 1 January 1993.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

No enforcement notices were issued or prosecutions initiated by the Health and Safety Executive against health services in Scotland in relation to breaches of the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 during the period 1 January 1993 to 31 March 1994. Figures for the current financial year are not yet available.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 18 January 1995

HEALTH

Cheviot and Wansbeck Hospital

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many jobs have been lost in the last two years in the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital and trusts; and what were the financial savings;

(2) how many litigation cases Cheviot and Wansbeck trust has been involved in over the last two years;

(3) how many staff of each grade of nurse and health care assistant work in the maternity unit at the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital;

(4) how many complaints were made by general practitioners about sub-standard care and inappropriately early discharges from the Cheviot and Wansbeck hospital.

Mr. Sackville: These are matters for Cheviot and Wansbeck national health service trust, which was set up on 1 April 1994. The hon. Member may wish to contact its chairman, Mr. Roger Baker, for details.

Forensic Psychiatry Patients

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many forensic psychiatry patients have been treated in each regional health authority in each year since 1988.

Mr. Bowis: The tables show the number of admissions and number of out-patients for the forensic psychiatry specialty by regional health authority for the period 1988–89 to 1993–94.

Number of ordinary admissions and outpatient attendances, forensic psychiatry specialty, England and Regional Health Authority areas, 1988–89 to 1993–94

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Ordinary admissions (finished consultant episodes)						
Northern	88	75	25	128	151	72
Yorkshire	135	148	161	234	144	108
Trent	72	82	124	100	106	138
East Anglian	35	64	109	93	79	75
North West Thames	108	154	70	71	136	314
North East Thames	31	40	14	98	112	81
South East Thames	74	112	90	76	68	42
South West Thames	27	1	7	8	22	26
Wessex	16	48	46	42	41	15
Oxford	0	18	28	52	36	27
South Western	26	53	105	140	176	156
West Midlands	62	62	95	98	98	98
Mersey	50	28	68	79	91	91
North Western	107	104	136	161	210	224
Special Health Authorities	102	31	28	78	64	70
England	933	1,020	1,106	1,458	1,534	1,537
Total outpatient attendances						
Northern	459	505	[1]410	485	531	530
Yorkshire	2,894	2,067	2,037	2,299	3,094	3,174
Trent	1,533	819	724	537	389	385
East Anglian	190	285	472	557	400	394
North West Thames	0	0	0	166	188	[2]2,289
North East Thames	2,788	2,617	2,082	801	338	329
South East Thames	412	926	1,547	813	725	1,204
South West Thames	109	83	122	95	67	61
Wessex	0	195	355	90	329	60
Oxford	5	58	106	291	415	542
South Western	452	297	231	567	632	273
West Midlands	996	1,475	1,317	1,415	1,127	1,058
Mersey	874	918	930	970	1,223	987
North Western	48	913	1,096	1,015	1,658	3,621
Special Health Authorities	0	0	1,246	1,617	1,253	1,424
England	10,760	11,158	[1]12,675	11,718	12,369	16,331

Source:

DH Forms KP70 and KH09.

[1] Revised.

[2] In previous years forensic psychiatry data were included in the mental illness specialty and cannot be separately identified.

Small Pharmacies

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received during the past three months concerning the need to maintain the professional allowance for small pharmacies dispensing between 1,000 and 1,500 prescriptions per month; and if she proposes to modify her intended policy in the light of such representations.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *983*, since when there have been a further seven representations about the graduated transitional payment. We expect to discuss the matter with pharmacists' representatives in the forthcoming pay round.

Midwives

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the ratio of patients to midwives in *(a)* the Northumberland health authority and *(b)* the Wansbeck and Cheviot maternity unit.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the vice chairman of Northumberland health authority, Mr. David Wright, and the chairman of the Cheviot and Wansbeck national health service trust, Mr. Roger Baker, for details.

Community Care

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking to monitor local authority spending in the independent sector in their provision of community care services.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities are required to spend 85 per cent. of the Department of Social Security transfer element of their special transitional grant in the independent sector. Annual returns of this expenditure have to be agreed by the district auditor before being submitted to the Department of Health.

Health Education Authority

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 10 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *126–27*, what plans she has to put out to tender in the private sector the work now being carried out by the Health Education Authority.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *126–27*.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many places in secure accommodation are currently available for persons aged under 16 years in Northumberland; at what location; and what were the figures for the previous five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: There are five places in secure accommodation approved for use by young people in Northumberland, located at Netherton Park children's home, Morpeth. This figure has not changed in the period requested, but there are plans to provide an additional seven places by mid-1996. The places are not restricted to those aged under 16.

Cot Mattresses

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has in respect of the effect of biodegradation of compounds of antimony used in flameproofing cot mattresses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The hypothesis that toxic gases are released from the biodegradation of the flameproofing compounds in cot mattresses and covers was thoroughly investigated in 1990 by an expert working group chaired by Professor Paul Turner. The group found no evidence that there was a link between sudden infant death syndrome incidence, the presence of antimony and associated low levels of arsenic impurity, or phosphorus additives in cot mattresses and their covers, microbial contamination of those mattresses and covers and the generation of toxic volatile gases.

Dr. Kenneth Calman, the chief medical officer, has recently set up an expert group to steer further work by the Department of Health on cot deaths. This group is chaired by Lady Limerick.

The group's terms of reference are:

> To review the findings of the report on "Sudden Infant Death Syndromes (The "Turner Report", 1991) and any subsequent data on hypotheses linking antimony with unexplained deaths in infants; and to advise the CMO on what further studies should be undertaken to investigate postulated causal relationships between chemicals and cot deaths.

The group has been asked to review the available material and to provide the Department with advice as quickly as possible.

Guillain Barré Syndrome

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases known to her Department children vaccinated against measles and rubella in the last five years have developed symptoms of Guillain Barré syndrome; what research has been done by her Department or elsewhere into the causes of the syndrome; what action she will be taking or is considering; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Guillain Barré syndrome is a rare neurological condition that usually presents as acute flaccid paralysis. The condition is thought to have a post-infectious aetiology. In its detailed review of adverse effects of vaccines, the United States Institute of Medicine could find no evidence to support or reject a causal association between Guillain Barré syndrome and measles or rubella immunisation.

Three cases of Guillain Barré syndrome after measles, mumps and rubella vaccine have been reported to the committee on the safety of medicines since 1988. The reporting of a temporal association with immunisation does not necessarily imply causality. One case of Guillain Barré syndrome has been reported in association with the measles and rubella immunisation campaign. Further investigations are being undertaken into this case.

At the instigation of the Department of Health, the communicable disease surveillance centre of the public health laboratory service set up nationwide surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis—for which Guillain Barré syndrome is the commonest cause—between July 1991 and June 1994. The study is being analysed, but preliminary evaluation suggests that the number of cases reported in association with the measles and rubella

campaign are similar to those that could be expected in the absence of the campaign.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff in her Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Sackville: Information about more junior staff is not held centrally. Since February 1993, there have been two reports of job offers from staff in grade 3 and above. So far, one of these has been followed by an application under the business appointments procedure.

Ambulance Service

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times an ambulance has not arrived within the national charter standard time by ambulance service in each year since April 1991.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The national patients charter standard provides that ambulances responding to an emergency call should arrive at the scene of an incident in 95 per cent. of cases, within 14 minutes for urban services and within 19 minutes for rural services.

Information was not collected in sufficient detail in 1991–92 to provide the figures requested. Figures for 1992–93 and 1993–94 are shown in the table.

Ambulance Service	*1992–93 Number*	*1992–93 percentage of all responses*	*1993–94 Number*	*1993–94 Percentage of all responses*
Rural Ambulance Services				
Cumbria	1,341	8.8	1,277	8.0
Durham	876	2.9	1,392	4.5
Northumbria	782	1.0	880	1.1
Humberside	342	0.8	708	1.6
North Yorkshire	1,053	4.6	1,206	5.6
Derbyshire	1,500	4.3	1,646	4.2
Leicestershire	975	3.0	1,082	3.0
Lincolnshire	844	4.7	893	4.5
Nottinghamshire	1,248	2.3	1,450	2.4
Cambridgeshire	1,105	5.8	886	4.3
Norfolk	901	3.3	1,108	3.6
Suffolk	939	7.9	652	4.7
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	1,829	3.1	2,001	3.2
Essex	896	1.4	1,711	2.4
East Sussex	835	2.3	993	2.4
Kent	2,093	3.6	2,755	4.6
West Sussex	716	2.7	703	2.2
Dorset	1,096	3.9	1,670	5.3
Hampshire	1,229	2.6	1,205	2.4
Wiltshire	618	4.1	800	4.9
Isle of Wight	88	2.1	77	1.5
Berkshire	284	1.0	736	2.4
Two Shires[1]	989	2.5	1,116	2.9
Oxfordshire	936	5.8	1,320	7.5
West Country[2]	2,868	4.3	4,323	5.9
Gloucestershire	433	3.2	581	3.8
Hereford and Worcestershire	608	2.9	672	2.9
Shropshire	508	4.0	452	3.2
Staffordshire	1,862	4.7	1,845	3.8
Warwickshire	683	4.7	640	4.0
Lancashire	934	1.3	1,091	1.4
Urban Ambulance Service				
Cleveland	725	3.0	967	4.0
West Yorkshire	6,494	6.0	5,295	4.4
South Yorkshire	5,678	10.1	6,526	11.0
Surrey	2,272	5.2	3,089	6.3
London	196,921	41.5	186,973	37.8
Avon	3,691	10.0	5,085	12.8
West Midlands	12,526	8.9	10,189	6.7
Mersey	6,815	4.6	5,511	3.4
Manchester	4,333	2.6	4,073	2.3

[1] Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire Ambulance Services combined to form Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust on 1 April 1993. Figures for 1992–3 have been combined for ease of comparison.

[2] Cornwall, Devon and Somerset Ambulance Services combined to form West Country Ambulance Service NHS Trust on 1 April 1993. Figures for 1992–93 have been combined for ease of comparison.

Budgets

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total budget of *(a)* fundholders and *(b)* district health authorities in 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Details of budgets allocated to general practitioner fundholders and district health authorities are shown in the table. General practitioner fundholder data include allocations for drugs and staff in addition to the hospital and community health services that they can purchase.

	1991–92 £ million	*1992–93 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*
General Practitioner Fundholders	400	800	1,800	2,800
District Health Authorities	17,300	18,200	17,900	18,200

Notes:
1. Allocations to district health authorities and general practitioner fundholders are made by regional health authorities who have provided the information in the table.
2. Final district health authority cash limits for the years 1991–92, 1992–93, and 1993–94 include initial cash limits and adjustments in-year, and exclude general practitioner fundholder allocations. For 1994–95 the figures recorded are initial cash limits and exclude in-year adjustments. Some regions have included general practitioner fundholder budgets in these initial cash limits.

Cot Deaths

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the budget for health promotional activities on cot death in each of the last five years; and what is the projected budget for the next two years.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The table shows the amounts that the Department has spent on publicity aimed specifically at reducing the risk of cot death since the introduction of the "Back to Sleep" campaign in December 1991 and Health Education Authority initiatives aimed at reducing smoking prevalence in district groups.

	1991–92 £000s	*1992–93 £000s*	*1993–94 £000s*	*1994–95 £000s*	*1995–96 £000s*	*1996–97 £000s*
DH Expenditure						
Cot Death	1,611	—	21	30	—	—
HEA Expenditure						
Teenage Smoking Campaign	2,101	2,650	2,650	1,362	—	—
Smoking in Pregnancy	500	500	500	446	—	—
Adult Smoking	-	5,438	8,256	8,052	4,000	4,000
Birth to Five	253	21	77	'107	—	—
Pregnancy Book	326	328	151	'196	—	—
Total	4,791	9,147	11,655	10,193	4,000	4,000

' Provisional figures for the year to date. Further expenditure is planned to the end of the current financial year.

The Department of Health budgets for 1995–96 and 1996–97 and most of those for the HEA have yet to be agreed.

Departmental expenditure in 1991 went towards a press and television cot death campaign, as well as the production and distribution of a departmental leaflet, "Reducing the Risk of Cot Death", which has since been reprinted and almost 5 million copies distributed so far.

The recently announced national anti-smoking campaign managed by the HEA over the next three financial years will be primarily aimed at adults, and especially parents of young children. This is particularly relevant to cot death because smoking is a major risk factor associated with it. The HEA's two major publications in this field, the "Pregnancy Book", given free to first-time mothers and "Birth to Five", given free to first-time parents, both contain advice on reducing the risk of cot death.

Much health promotion work of this type is carried out by local health care units and health authorities. It is not possible to quantify this either in terms of time or cost. Health promotion activity aimed at pregnant women and new mothers is carried out in face-to-face contacts by individual midwives, health visitors, general practitioners, obstetricians and paediatricians during the course of routine care.

With the efforts of all those health professionals and the success of those initiatives, there has been a remarkable reduction in the number of cot deaths. In England and Wales over the period 1988–1993, we are pleased to say that the numbers have fallen by more than 70 per cent.

TRANSPORT

Passenger Timetable

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding inaccuracies in the Great Britain passenger timetable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: We have received a small number of representations about inaccuracies in the Great Britain passenger timetable. The timetable is published by BR, which is responsible for its accuracy.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February

1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Norris: The rules on outside appointments do not require Departments to maintain records of job offers to their staff.

Roads Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of United Kingdom roads expenditure, broken down to show the split between central and local government, for each of the following time periods expressed in 1993 prices *(a)* 1969 to 1974, *(b)* 1974 to 1979, *(c)* 1979 to 1984, *(d)* 1984 to 1989, *(e)* 1989 to 1994 and *(f)* 1994 to 1999 planned; and if he will provide the equivalent figures showing central and local government expenditures on the United Kingdom rail system.

Dr. Mawhinney: Comparable figures for the split between national and local roads expenditure relate to England only and are not available before 1989. Figures for each of the years 1989–90 to 1993–94 and estimated outturns for 1994–95 are given in 1993–94 prices. Central Government rail figures represent the external finance limit for BR-Railtrack; local government rail figures represent support for services in the metropolitan areas.

£ million

	Roads		*Rail*	
	National	*Local*	*Central Government*	*Local Government*
1989–90	1,655	623	877	125
1990–91	2,042	724	1,249	128
1991–92	1,983	838	1,584	139
1992–93	2,022	923	2,137	144
1993–94	2,040	1,039	1,461	143
1994–95	1,945	851	1,496	359

Forward plans for 1995–96 to 1997–98 will be published in the transport report 1995.

Vehicle Checks

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list vehicle spot checks planned and carried out in each of the last 12 months, stating in each case how many vehicles were tested, how many failed to meet roadworthiness standards, and how many planned checks were cancelled due to lack of police resources.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Vehicle Inspectorate agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Ms Joan Walley, dated 18 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning vehicle spot checks planned and carried out in each of the last 12 months, stating in each case how many vehicles were tested, how many failed to meet roadworthiness standards, and how many planned checks were cancelled due to lack of police resources.

The attached table shows the number of vehicle spot checks planned and carried out in each of the last 12 months, and the number failing to meet roadworthiness standards, to the extent that prohibition action was necessary.

The number of planned checks cancelled due to lack of police support is not available. The information we do have is set out below and covers the period from 1 April 1994 to the end of September 1994. It shows the number of unproductive hours (attendance hours) resulting from the withdrawal of police support from organised checks in progress.

Month	*Attendance Hours Lost*	*Month*	*Attendance Hours Lost*
April 1994	310	July 1994	344
May 1994	316	August 1994	338
June 1994	310	September 1994	327

Table 1

	Heavy Goods Vehicles			*Public Service Vehicles*			*Other Vehicle Types*		
Month	*Planned*	*Inspected*	*Failed (Prohibitions)*	*Planned*	*Inspected*	*Failed (Prohibitions)*	*Planned*	*Inspected*	*Failed (Prohibitions)*
December 1993	10,247	8,130	996	2,266	2,568	183	4,662	4,246	261
January 1994	"	6,560	933	"	1,601	119	"	2,099	112
February 1994	"	10,956	1,458	"	2,672	205	"	3,740	213
March 1994	"	18,297	2,720	"	5,577	494	"	6,985	398
April 1994	11,076	11,505	2,017	2,443	1,467	171	4,506	2,490	252
May 1994	"	12,834	2,132	"	2,140	219	"	3,328	291
June 1994	"	10,578	1,644	"	2,435	295	"	3,362	232
July 1994	"	14,183	2,483	"	3,701	429	"	4,405	269
August 1994	"	10,982	1,724	"	2,619	250	"	4,143	237
September 1994	"	12,081	2,024	"	2,651	344	"	7,867	308
October 1994	"	11,986	1,979	"	2,602	285	"	4,893	373
November 1994	"	10,448	1,566	"	2,752	235	"	6,465	588

Notes:

1. The number of planned inspections has been calculated from using the planned inspections for the year.
2. In relation to roadworthiness enforcement inspections "failed" has been interpreted as being the number of occasions when it was found necessary to issue a roadworthiness prohibition notice.
3. The inspections include all roadworthiness enforcement spot checks and exclude any conducted in connection with:
   a) accident or mechanical defect investigations and
   b) roadworthiness inspections done for operator licensing purposes.

Public Transport

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to redirect reductions in the roads budget into expenditure on public transport.

Dr. Mawhinney: The broad apportionment of my Department's budget was announced on 29 November. Details will be published in due course in the transport report 1995.

Mr. R. Howard

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to reply formally to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration's draft report on the care of Mr. R. Howard of Bexley.

Mr. Watts: The Department of Transport made its detailed response to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration last November, since when there has been further correspondence on factual and textual matters.

Highway Code

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department have made of the percentage of total motorists owning a current copy of the highway code.

Mr. Norris: On the basis of sales figures provided by HMSO, about 20 per cent. of motorists, some 6.8 million, have bought a copy of the current edition of the highway code.

Motorists (Training)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when his Department will announce plans for a scheme to offer further training for motorists who have already passed their test.

Mr. Norris: Soon.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's response to the proposal advanced by the Automobile Association for a graduated points threshold for new drivers.

Mr. Norris: We have considered carefully a number of proposals for improving the safety of new drivers, including those put forward by the Automobile Association. I am pleased to say that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) has introduced the Road Traffic (New Drivers) Bill, which provides for the retesting of newly qualified drivers who commit certain traffic offences.

Rolling Stock (Safety)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response British Rail made to recommendation 55 of the Hidden report on the Clapham junction railway accident in respect of mark 1 rolling stock including class 411, 413, 415 and 416 vehicles in use on Network South East's south-eastern division routes in Kent.

Mr. Watts: British Rail carried out its stated programme of research into the structural integrity of its rolling stock, which included an assessment of the structural changes necessary to strengthen mark 1 vehicles with an expected life span of eight years or more. BR completed the programme by April 1991 and then discussed the results with the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate. BR concluded that very few of the mark 1 vehicles in classes 411, 413, 415 and 416 were projected to remain in service for eight years or more, and that it would not be reasonably practicable to carry out structural changes to these vehicles or to the remainder of mark 1 vehicles. I understand that Her Majesty's railway inspectorate agreed with BR's conclusions.

Motorists (Sight)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department have made of the percentage of total motorists with inadequate eyesight due to *(a)* an absence of glasses or contact lenses and *(b)* inappropriate glasses or contact lenses.

Mr. Norris: None.

Safety Schemes, Derbyshire

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the allocations that have been made to Derbyshire county council under supplementary credit approval for local safety schemes over the last six years.

Mr. Norris: The allocations are:

Year	*£*
1991–92	300,000
1992–93	250,000
1993–94	330,000
1994–95	602,000
1995–96	642,000

Supplementary credit approvals were allocated for 1994–95 and 1995–96. Before then, support was given as transport supplementary grant, 50 per cent., and annual capital guideline, 50 per cent. Specific allocations for local safety schemes were not given before 1991–92.

Train Drivers' Radio Phones

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of ensuring that drivers' radio phones are effective at all points on the rail network through the installation of extra line side transmitter relay facilities;

(2) what agreement he has reached with British Rail and its subsidiary companies to ensure that drivers' radio phones can be used effectively on all parts of the rail network;

(3) what estimate he has made of the proportion of the rail network on which drivers' radio phones are ineffective because of reception blackspots;

(4) if he will publish a map indicating those sections of the rail network on which drivers' radio phones are ineffective because of reception blackspots.

Mr. Watts: These are operational matters for British Rail and Railtrack. I understand that British Rail has fitted the major part of the network with a system known as the national radio network. The target coverage for the NRN is 98 per cent. The remaining 2 per cent. of the network consists of problem spots, mainly in cuttings or tunnels, where complete coverage is not reasonably practicable unless the cab secure radio system for communicating with train drivers is provided. There is no map of these problem spots. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate continues to monitor implementation of the cab radio programme by British Rail and Railtrack.

Cost Benefit Analyses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria he uses to assess whether value for money is obtained from his Department's road programme.

Mr. Watts: The Department employs cost-benefit analyses to appraise new road schemes at different stages of their preparation to ensure that they will provide value for money. The benefits measure is accident reductions and time and vehicle operating costs savings to road users. The analysis is complemented by wide-ranging appraisals of environmental impacts.

When schemes are completed, the accuracy of the predicted traffic flows—the key input for both the cost-benefit analyses and the environmental appraisal—is monitored. In response to a recommendation of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, research is being undertaken to enhance and extend "before and after" scheme monitoring.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what adjustments he intends to propose in respect of the fixed trip matrix assumption in COBA.

Mr.Watts: In response to the recent report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, the Department has issued guidance on the use of currently available techniques for variable trip matrix appraisal. These appraisals will be undertaken for all national road schemes in preparation, except where prior assessment shows that the trip matrix will not vary significantly as a result of the scheme.

The Department has commissioned consultants to develop improved techniques for undertaking variable matrix economic appraisal, to complement the fixed matrix COBA program.

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received the eighth annual report of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Mr Norris: The report has been received by my right hon. Friend and copies have today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Jury Service (Blind People)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many blind people were turned down for jury service in the last year for which figures are available and in each of the previous four years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department does not collect data about the number of blind people who were either discharged or excused from jury service. Such information for the last five years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost and its accuracy could not be guaranteed.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Since February 1993, one offer of employment has been reported and was followed by an application to join the company.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Information about offers of employment from outside companies is not held centrally. Since February 1993, four applications to join an outside employer have been received.

Internet

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce measures to combat the spread of pornography on computer via the Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: CCTA, the Government centre for information systems, has established a collaborative open group to examine and discuss all the ethical issues relating to the use of the Internet, and to report to me with recommendations.

All views and suggestions on such matters are most welcome, and should be sent either via Internet electronic mail to "ethics & ccta.gov.uk" or by post to:

Internet Ethics COG
Room WG6
CCTA
Rosebery Court
St Andrews Business Park
Norwich NR7 OHS

Information Super-highway

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much public investment has been spent on research into the information super-highway by the Government for each of the financial years 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93, and 1993–94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Most of the public investment in research into leading-edge communications networks, or information super-highways, has focused on the joint academic network known as SuperJANET. The Higher Education Funding Council contributed £5.35 million and £8.06 million in the respective financial years 1992–93 and 1993–94 to the development of this multimedia broadband network for universities and other research institutions.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Great Clock

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee, pursuant to his answer of 8 December, *Official Report*, column *327*, when the modernised lighting behind the clock faces of the Great Clock will become fully operational; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ray Powell: The new lighting will become fully operational at dusk on 19 January 1995 and it will save some £1,000 in electricity and £2,500 in maintenance costs each year. Thus, the installation cost of £20,000 will be recovered from savings in six years. The new fittings that have been installed are a special type of fluorescent bulb, which works on a high frequency induction principle. They have a lamp life of 60,000 hours which is about 13 years of normal use, and the output from each 55 watt bulb is equivalent to a 250 watt conventional incandescent lamp.

Banqueting Rooms Events (Sponsors)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee for what reasons the names of hon. Members sponsoring events in the Banqueting Room A, B, C and D are no longer listed on the notice board in the Terrace Corridor.

Mr. Colin Shepherd *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* A new notice board was installed in the corridor outside the Terrace Dining Rooms during the Christmas recess. The lettering for this board has now been received, and I am pleased to advise the hon. Member that, for the convenience of those attending, the names of hon. Members hosting functions in Banqueting Rooms A, B, C and D are once again listed on the notice board in the terrace corridor.

PRIME MINISTER

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Prime Minister how many staff in his Office have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of those reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

The Prime Minister: Since February 1993, there have not been any applications for staff in my Office to join outside employers.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's view of the report by Lord Finsberg on Cyprus to be discussed at the Council of Europe meeting in Strasbourg on 2 February.

The Prime Minister: Lord Finsberg's report on the situation in Cyprus has been prepared in his capacity as rapporteur of the political committee of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe. As such, it would not be proper for Her Majesty's Government to comment on the judgments made in the report. We share Lord Finsberg's desire to see continuing efforts to resolve the Cyprus dispute on the basis of UN resolutions, most recently UN Security Council resolution 939 of 29 July 1994.

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he made to Ministers or officials of the then Irish Government over delays in the extradition from the Irish Republic of Brendan Smyth.

The Prime Minister: None.

Modbury Team Ministry

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister what are the reasons for the delay in Privy Council approval for the Modbury team ministry within the Exeter diocese; and when a decision will be reached.

Mr. Alison: I have been asked to reply.

The matter is not yet with the Privy Council. The position is that the Church Commissioners have recently considered three representations against a draft Pastoral Scheme providing, inter alia, for the creation of the Modbury team ministry. The Commissioners' conclusions have now been shared with the Diocesan Bishop and their decision is expected to be announced shortly.

TREASURY

Inflation Forecasts

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of Her Majesty's Treasury panel of independent forecasters were, in their latest estimates, forecasting an inflation rates of less than 2.5 per cent. in 1996.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The inflation requested can be found in table B7 of the panel's latest report. A copy of the report is available in the House of Commons Library.

Taxation

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimates of the personal allowance as a percentage of average manual earnings in *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95 and *(d)* 1995–96 for taxpayers who were (i) a single person, (ii) a married man with no children, (iii) a married man with two children and (iv) a married man with four children.

Sir George Young: Using the illustrative assumptions for the growth in earnings and prices given in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1995–96, real take-home pay for a married man on average earnings for all occupations will rise by £3.50 a week between 1992–93 and 1995–96 and for a single man by £7.50 a week.

Estimates of the income tax threshold as a percentage of average male manual earnings based on illustrative assumptions for earnings growth in 1994–95 and 1995–96 are in the table. A married person's tax threshold is unaffected by the number of children.

Since the introduction of the lower rate band in 1992–93 taxpayers with income just above the threshold pay tax at a rate of only 20 per cent.

	Tax threshold		Tax threshold as a percentage of average male manual earnings	
	Single person £	Married man[1] £	Single person	Married man[1]
1992–93	3445	5165	24.4	36.5
1993–94	3445	5165	23.8	35.7
1994–95	3445	5165	[2]23.0	[2]34.5
1995–96	3525	4815	[2]22.5	[2]30.7

[1] Assumes that the married man receives a full married couple's allowance.

[2] Provisional. Assumes average male manual earnings increase by 3.5 per cent. in 1994–95 and 4.5 per cent. in 1995–96 in line with the assumptions for growth in average earnings given in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995–96.

Electronic Mail

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to be able to receive and respond to communications via electronic mail.

Mr. Nelson: The Treasury already sends out information electronically. Its Internet service was launched on 15 November 1994.

Material is provided on the Teasury's own Internet server on the world wide web. In addition to the world wide web, the same information can be obtained by electronic mail or by file transfer.

Users can also obtain help about the service using electronic mail. My Department has replied to all queries it has received to date.

As the service expands the Treasury hopes to be able to respond to more communications.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the lowest rate of exchange between the pound sterling and the deutschmark in February 1993; and what has been the change in the rate of the pound sterling against *(a)* the deutschmark *(b)* the ecu and *(c)* the dollar since then;

(2) what part, a desire to protect the value of the pound sterling fully against other EEC currencies played in the uneven interest rates this year;

(3) if *(a)* pound sterling and *(b)* the dollar are overvalued; and how over valuation is to be measured;

(4) what was the percentage reduction in the value of the pound sterling against the ecu and against non-ecu currencies included in the Bank of England index since August 1992;

(5) what conclusion he has drawn from Britain's membership of the ERM of the EMS.

(6) if he will publish an assessment of the effects of Britain's membership of the ERM on *(a)* jobs, *(b)* growth, *(c)* manufacturing and *(d)* the balance of payments.

Mr. Nelson: Movements in the exchange rate are considered as part of the general assessment of monetary conditions in setting monetary policy. The Government recognise the value of a stable exchange rate, but we do not set target rates. The valuation of any currency is determined by transactions in the foreign exchange markets.

The United Kingdom's membership of the ERM demonstrated that, for currency mechanisms to achieve greater exchange rate stability, broader economic convergence between member states is required.

Levels of employment, growth, manufacturing output and the balance of payments are affected by a wide range of factors; it is not possible to isolate the effects of any single factor.

Sterling's exchange rates against ecu and non-ecu currencies are published in table 7.1A of the Central Statistical Office's "Financial Statistics".

EU Price Index

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the EU harmonised price index is due to be introduced; how it will be constructed; and what plans there are to use it to update or replace the current retail prices index.

Mr. Nelson: The Statistical Office of the European Communities—Eurostat—has drawn up a Council regulation that prescribes that harmonised consumer price indices be developed from spring 1996. The methodology for constructing these indices is currently under discussion between groups of experts from EU member states and Eurostat. The harmonised consumer price index will be produced in addition to the retail prices index.

Central Statistical Office

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the budget of the Central Statistical Office was for each year from 1979; and what the projected budget is for the years 1994 to 1999 in current year prices.

Mr. Nelson: The table shows the net expenditure of the Central Statistical Office. The CSO's first full financial year as a separate Department with its own accounts was 1990–91, but also shown are figures from 1986–87, which have been published in the departmental report for information purposes. No figures are available prior to 1986–87. Figures from 1995–96 reflect planned expenditure. All figures are calculated in current year prices.

Year	Net Expenditure £ million
1986–87	21.9
1987–88	21.5
1988–89	25.5
1989–90	24.6
1990–91	32.0
1991–92	36.2
1992–93	41.6
1993–94	44.0
1994–95	48.1
1995–96	47.3
1996–97	44.4
1997–98	43.2
1998–99	42.3

Income Tax

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of income tax revenue was paid by the lowest *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent., *(c)* 20 per cent. and *(d)* 30 per cent. of earners in each year from 1978–79 inclusive; and what are his future projections.

Sir George Young: The information requested is given in the table. The bottom 5 per cent. of income tax payers have accounted for less than one half of 1 per cent. of the total income tax liabilities for each year since 1978–79. Estimates for 1993–94 onwards are based on projections from the 1992–93 survey of personal incomes.

Shares of total tax liability[1]

	Groups of taxpayers (percentage)		
	Bottom 30 per cent.	*Bottom 20 per cent.*	*Bottom 10 per cent*
1978–79	7	3	1
1979–80	7	3	1
1980–81	6	3	1
1981–82	7	3	1
1982–83	7	3	1
1983–84	6	3	1
1984–85	6	3	1
1985–86	7	3	1
1986–87	6	3	1
1987–88	6	3	1
1988–89	6	3	1
1989–90	6	3	1
1990–91	5	2	1
1991–92	5	2	1
1992–93	4	2	[3]—
1993–94[2]	4	2	[3]—
1994–95[2]	4	2	[3]—
1995–96[2]	4	2	[3]—

[1] For years up to and including 1989–90, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation in 1990–91, husbands and wives are counted separately.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Less than 0.5 per cent.

Retail Prices Index

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to update the basis upon which the retail prices index is calculated; and what amendments have been made to it since 1990.

Mr. Nelson: The Chancellor announced in answer to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 10 January, *Official Report*, column 9, his acceptance of the recommendations made by the retail prices index advisory committee in its reports, Cm 2717 and Cm 2716, on owner-occupiers' housing costs and cars respectively. The changes will be implemented in the RPI from February 1995. The recommendations of the advisory committee in its previous reports, Cm 2142 in January 1993 and Cm 2153 in February 1993, on council tax and holidays were implemented in the RPI for 1993 and, for United Kingdom holidays, 1994. Minor changes to the items included in the RPI are made each year to take account of changes in consumer spending patterns. Details of the 1993 and 1994 changes are given in the April 1993 and March 1994 issues of the publication "Retail Prices Index", CSO business monitor MM23. All the above publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Nelson: The preferred carrier for any civil servant's travel will depend on the circumstances of the journey concerned, including value for money. For regular requirements the Treasury has entered into arrangements with British Airways and British Midland.

VAT on Fuel

Ms Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised from value added tax on gas and electricity standing charges since its introduction.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Standing charges on gas and electricity supply from 1 April to the end of December 1994 will give rise to £100 million of VAT.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimation he has made of the proportion in value added tax as a percentage of the total bill paid in *(a)* standing charge and *(b)* actual energy consumption by (i) low-income households and (ii) high-income households.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The answers will depend on the particular energy company and factors such as whether an economy rate is used, severity of weather, level of insulation and so on. The Government have made available a substantial package of help for those on low incomes.

Civil Aviation Authority (VAT)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the status of the Civil Aviation Authority for VAT purposes in respect of en route air navigation services now; what it will be after 1 April; who took the decision to change its status; what will be the implications of its changed status; what are the revenue implications; and who will benefit from them.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 14 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *651*.

Tax Office, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what targets Doncaster tax office *(a)* achieved and *(b)* failed to achieve during the last financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Both tax offices in Doncaster—Doncaster 1 and Doncaster 2—achieved all key assessment and customer service targets in the year to April 1994, as shown in table. With the exception of one target in each office, all key compliance targets were also met. Doncaster collection office also achieved all except one of its key operating targets in the year, as the table shows.

	Doncaster 1 Target per cent.	Doncaster 1 Achieved per cent.	Doncaster 2 Target per cent.	Doncaster 2 Achieved per cent.
Schedule D Assessments.				
Schedule E open cases 1992–93 1991–92 and earlier	98	99.7	98	98.85
larger and complex cases	90	99.3	90.5	98.95
other cases	98.5	99.55	95	99.68
	98.5	99.98	98.5	99.96
CT assessing reduction in assessment made late	5	86	10	62
Return forms examined by October 1993	99	100	99	100
EOY returns cleared by October 1993	99	99.8	99.4	99.84
P11Ds examined by December 1993	98	100	99	100
Correspondence dealt with within 28 days of receipt	94	99.98	94	99.9
Callers without an appointment dealt with within 15 minutes	—	—	95	96.15
Compliance				
Corporation Tax				
Settlements per unit	15	17.65	15	12.77
Average Case points	10.7	12.13	9.7	11.75
Total settlements	6	6	5	6
Income Tax				
Settlement per unit	25	27.15	25	36.59
Average case points	8.6	9.1	7.86	8.34
Total settlements	95	82	105	146

Doncaster collection

	Target Per cent.	Achieved Per cent.
Assessed taxes	63.6	69.5
PAYE—All cases	86	85.4
PAYE—Returns	92	97.8
PAYE—Underpayment	69	85.4
PAYE—Band 1	93	97.7
Band 2	92	93.9
Miscellaneous work arrears	60	80.2

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

The Attorney-General: Since 1 February 1993, one offer of employment has been reported by a member of staff in the Crown Prosecution Service. No such offers have been reported in the legal secretariat to the law officers, the Treasury Solicitor's department or the Serious Fraud Office.

Brendan Smyth

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General how many times between April 1993 and February 1994 his advice was sought by *(a)* British Ministers, *(b)* British Government officials, *(c)* Irish Republic Ministers, *(d)* the Irish Attorney-General or *(e)* his officials about his view on the effect of lapse of time clause in the Extradition Act 1987 on the extradition of Brendan Smyth.

The Attorney-General: It is a well-established convention that the law officers do not normally disclose whether they have been asked to advise or the nature of their advice. The hon. Gentleman will however also note that the Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987 is not a United Kingdom statute but an Act of the Dail.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on the use of death penalty for British citizens found guilty of drug trafficking abroad.

Mr. Baldry: The use of the death penalty for persons found guilty of drug trafficking abroad is a matter for those countries concerned, provided that respect is shown for the provisions on the death penalty of international human rights law. Once a British national has been sentenced to death, and all local appeals for clemency have been exhausted, we consider whether, and at what level, any further appeal should be made. Intervention is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Child Labour, India

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of India about the employment of children in Tirupur to make garments for supply to United Kingdom high street retailers.

Mr. Baldry: We have urged all United Nations member states to abide by the programme of action for the elimination of the exploitation of child labour, which was agreed in 1993 by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, of which India is a member.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had from Esmat Abdel Maguid on the issue of Libya's position in relation to the Lockerbie case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Dr. Meguid handed a copy of the Arab League's resolution concerning the Lockerbie bombing to Her Majesty's ambassador in Cairo on 31 March 1994. I discussed the Lockerbie issue with Dr. Meguid in November 1994.

East Timor

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to support the latest resolution of the European Parliament concerning the illegal occupation of East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: There is no obligation on EU member states to implement the recommendations on this resolution. The measures it proposes would not, in our view, bring about a change in the circumstances of East Timor. We believe that the continuing dialogue between Indonesia and Portugal, under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, offers the best prospect for securing agreement on a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement on the future of the territory.

United Kingdom Nationals (Expulsions)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom nationals have been expelled from other countries, and from which countries, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Goodlad: FCO staff have reported 27 offers of employment from outside employers since February 1993; 24 were followed up by an application.

Chechnya

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to a role for the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe, formerly CSCE, in resolving the conflict in Chechnya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe has an important role to play in the search for a settlement to the conflict in Chechnya, in particular in ensuring respect for human rights, the restoration of constitutional order and the preparation as soon as possible of elections.

The United Kingdom fully supports the efforts being undertaken by the OSCE chairman-in-office to maintain close contact with the Russian Government and welcomes Russia's willingness to involve the OSCE in the wider search for a long-term solution to the conflict.

Foreign Nationals (Expulsions)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many foreign nationals have been expelled from the United Kingdom in each year since 1979; and if he will list their nationalities.

Mr. Baldry: The number of foreign nationals—that is, diplomats officially accredited to missions in London—expelled from the United Kingdom since 1979 is as follows:

	Nationality	*Number*
1979	nil	—
1980	Libya	3
1981	Soviet Union	1
1982	nil	—
1983	Czechoslovakia	2
1984	Czechoslovakia	2
	Libya	2
	Soviet Union	1
1985	Soviet Union	2
1986	nil	—
1987	Bulgaria	1
	Soviet Union	1
1988	Soviet Union	1
	Cuba	2
	Vietnam	1
	Czechoslovakia	3
	Iraq	4
1989	Czechoslovakia	4
	South Africa	3
	Soviet Union	8
1990	Iraq	11
1991	Iraq	9
1992	Iran	1
1993	nil	—
1994	Iran	1
	Sudan	1

UN Human Rights Commission

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues will be discussed at the UN Human Rights commission in Geneva on 30 January.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During its annual meeting—30 January to 10 March 1995—the UN Commission on Human Rights will as usual discuss a wide range of subjects. It is likely to pass over 100 resolutions on thematic issues and on human rights in individual countries. A copy of the annotated agenda will be placed in the Library of the House.

Copenhagen Summit

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent Her

Majesty's Government at the United Nations summit for social development in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A final decision on attendance at the summit will be made nearer the date.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues Her Majesty's Government intend to raise as matters of priority at the United Nations summit for social development in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our principal priorities are to raise the level and improve the focus of the international debate around the issues of development.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sustainable Tourism

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received from the English regional tourist boards regarding the future of sustainable tourism projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have received no such representations, but I hope that the regional tourists boards will continue to support and participate in sustainable tourism projects. Their past efforts, and those of their project partners, will form the basis of a guide to good visitor management practice, to be published later this year by my Department, in collaboration with the Countryside and Rural Development Commissions and the English tourist board. I believe that this guide will prove helpful to the tourism industry in further developing sustainable tourism in this country.

Mr. McWilliam: To aks the Secretary of State for National Heritage what resources have been directed to sustainable tourism initiatives drawn up by the English regional tourist boards in the last three years.

Mr. Dorrell: Since December 1991 the English tourist board has committed, out of grant in aid from my Department, a total of £257,500 to six local sustainable tourism initiatives in which the regional tourist boards have been involved.

Community Television Channels

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the number of holders of cable television licences which are currently providing community television channels; if he will identify those companies and the areas in which community channels are operating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Independent Television Commission has awarded 95 licensable programme services licences, of which 35 are operational and providing local programming. Local programming is produced in Telewest's south London and Avon franchises, Devanha group's Coventry and Aberdeen franchises, Telecential's Swindon franchise, the Cable Corporation's Windsor franchise, the Comcast-managed Birmingham franchise, LCL Cable Communications' Leicester franchise, IVS Cable Holdings in Andover and in Videotron's London holdings.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what requirements are imposed on holders of cable television licences to provide community television channels.

Mr. Dorrell: Under broadcasting legislation, there are no requirements on holders of cable television franchises to provide a community service channel.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action he is taking to ensure that the provision of local community television channels by holders of cable television licences do not become subject to the monopoly control or influence of existing news providers.

Mr. Dorrell: The cross-media ownership restrictions in the Broadcasting Act 1990 prevent local newspapers, local radio and regional Channel 3 companies from controlling cable franchises if there is a significant overlap in the areas served.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action he is taking to ensure that all holders of cable television licences fulfil their requirement to provide a community television channel.

Mr. Dorrell: Under broadcasting legislation, there are no requirements on holders of cable television franchises to provide a community service channel.

Cable Television

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidance has been issued on access to community television channels provided by cable television companies under the terms of their licence.

Mr. Dorrell: If community television channels are provided by cable television companies, it is for individuals to decide whether they wish to subscribe to them.

Cross-media Ownership

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans his Department has for encouraging a European Commission resolution on pluralism and cross-media ownership.

Mr. Dorrell: I will consider my response once the European Commission launches its consultation exercise and provides details of its proposals.

ENVIRONMENT

Edwardes Committee

18. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made following the Edwardes committee report on the development of national parks.

Sir Paul Beresford: Part III of the Environment Bill, which is being considered in another place, includes provisions which take forward our commitments to primary legislation for the national parks. These commitments are set out in our 1992 policy statement, "Fit for the Future", which we issued in response to the report of the Edwardes committee.

Local Government Review (Shropshire)

19. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the recommendation of the local government review affecting Shropshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Local Government Commission published its final report on Shropshire last Wednesday. Following publication, there is a six-week period during which interested parties can make representations to us before we take any decisions on the commission's recommendations.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

23. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he foresees the development of compulsory competitive tendering on housing management.

Mr. Curry: We have put in place the legislative framework extending compulsory competitive tendering to housing management. The first contracts are due to be in operation from April 1996. I am pleased to say that local authorities are making good progress with their preparations.

Latham Report

24. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about progress in implementing the Latham Report.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The review implementation forum, which is chaired by Sir Michael Latham, reported to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 19 December, with recommendations for taking forward the proposals in the Latham report. The report will be discussed at a meeting of the construction industry's standing strategic group, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend, on 7 February.

Conservation Sites

25. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the designation of conservation sites under the European habitats directive.

Sir Paul Beresford: Work is well advanced on a draft list of possible sites which will be published shortly for public consultation in preparation for the submission of a list of candidate special areas of conservation. Formal designation of sites will take place only after agreement has been reached between the Government and the Commission and after the list of those sites has been adopted in accordance with the directive.

Landfill Tax

26. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed landfill tax on the operation of waste landfill sites in residential areas.

Mr. Atkins: The proposed landfill tax is not expected to raise issues which are specific to landfill sites in residential areas. However, we will issue a consultation paper shortly on the detailed operation of the tax, which will provide an opportunity for representations to be made. I will place a copy in the Library in due course.

Air Pollution (London)

29. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about air pollution in London.

Mr. Atkins: Ambient concentrations of sulphur dioxide and lead in London have been declining for many years. Levels of traffic-related pollutants are also expected to decline significantly as catalyst-equipped cars replace older more polluting models in the vehicle parc.

Repossessions

30. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest estimate of the number of households likely to lose their home through repossession for mortgage arrears in the next 12 months.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *731*.

Building and Construction Industry

31. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current assessment of the prospects for the building and construction industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Construction output began to increase last year after three and a half years of decline. New orders are increasing and growth is expected to continue.

The latest state of the construction industry report is currently being produced jointly by the Department of the Environment and representatives of the construction industry. Copies will be placed in the Library in due course.

Environmental Protection

32. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in environmental protection over the last year.

Sir Paul Beresford: A full account will be given in this year's annual report on "This Common Inheritance", which we will publish in the spring. It will report progress during 1994 both on the commitments in the environment White Paper series and on those in the sustainable development strategy published in January 1994.

Retail Development

33. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect on consumer choice and price competition of encouraging new retail development in the centre of our towns and cities.

Mr. Gummer: Locating new retail developments in or on the edge of town centres ensures that they are accessible to the largest number of people. This enables comparison shopping to be made, thereby increasing choice for all consumers and price competition.

Ministerial Visits

34. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what visits he has recently received from eastern European water Ministers.

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has received no recent visits from any eastern European water ministers, nor from any eastern European environment ministers with responsibility for water interests.

Single Regeneration Budget

35. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Ssecretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for a second round of bidding for the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend announced on 5 December 1994 that a second bidding round of the single regeneration budget will be launched later this year, under which £40 million will be available in 1996–97 for early funding of approved bids and £200 million in 1997–98.

Air Pollution (Eastern Europe)

36. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution the United Kingdom Government are making to improving air pollution in eastern Europe.

Mr. Atkins: The United Kingdom is a signatory, along with other states including those from Eastern Europe, of the United National Economic Commission for Europe convention on long range transboundary air pollution and plays an active part in the convention's various subsidiary bodies. Protocols under the convention control a range of air pollutants from sources within eastern and western Europe. The United Kingdom has made voluntary contributions to a UNECE trust fund to facilitate the participation of Eastern European countries in relevant meetings and in the convention.

In addition to its contribution to multilateral programmes of assistance to central and eastern Europe, the United Kingdom has also established the environmental know-how fund, which includes projects to combat air pollution in central and eastern Europe. Help is also being given for the restructuring of the energy sector in central and eastern European countries, with benefits to the environment, under the main know-how fund.

Legislation

37. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new items of legislation affecting the work of his Department have been introduced as Government Bills since 1979.

Mr. Gummer: Since 1979, there have been 79 Acts of Parliament on subjects for which the Department of the Environment is currently responsible. Of these, 64 were Government Bills, including 12 consolidation Bills. The remainder were introduced as private Member's Bills.

River Thames

38. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to put the River Thames to better use for residents and tourists.

Mr. Gummer: I shall shortly publish the report of the study of the Thames that I announced last year. This will be followed in the spring by draft strategic planning guidance for the Thames, on which I shall consult widely. The report and guidance will give encouragement to maximising the use of the river and the valuable resources it offers for resident and tourist alike.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of Merseyside development corporation.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Merseyside development corporation is to be wound up on 31 March 1998. The corporation is discussing succession arrangements with local partners.

Negative Equity

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *726*, if he will now update the table on negative equity with the latest figures available.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The estimates in the answer given on 30 November were in respect of the third quarter of 1994. Estimates based on Department of the Environment house price data for the fourth quarter will be available in February.

Leisure plc

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require Leisure plc to conform to the requirements of the Audit Commission Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) direction 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The requirements of the Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) direction, issued by the Audit Commission, apply to the local authority irrespective of whether the services are provided by the council or are contracted out to the private sector. We have no plans to review these arrangements.

Private Landlords

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require private landlords to meet the same standards as local authorities are required to meet under the Audit Commission Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) direction 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. It would not be appropriate to apply to private landlords the publication requirements imposed on public sector bodies.

Transitional Relief

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what level of transitional relief in *(a)* actual and *(b)* real terms Nottingham city council has received compared to the average district council;

(2) what level of transitional relief in *(a)* actual *(b)* real and *(c)* percentage terms Nottingham county council has received in each of the last five years; and what level was received in each case by the average shire county.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The table shows the amounts of community charge transitional relief grant paid to each billing authority in Nottinhamshire in respect of 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93, the amounts of council tax transitional relief grant claimed by each billing authority in respect of 1993–94 and 1994–95, and the percentage of the total grant paid in England for each year which each claim represents. Grant is paid to billing authorities; no grant is paid to county councils.

Amounts of community charge and council tax transitional relief grant paid to each billing authority in Nottinghamshire

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94*[1] £	*[1]1994–95* £
Ashfield	384,194 (0.2 per cent.)	3,673,827 (0.4 per cent.)	3,604,396 (0.4 per cent.)	162,276 (0.1 per cent.)	37,659 (0.1 per cent.)
Bassetlaw	519,195 (0.2 per cent.)	4,266,115 (0.4 per cent.)	4,157,831 (0.4 per cent.)	523,009 (0.1 per cent.)	157,305 (0.1 per cent.)
Broxtowe	736,134 (0.3 per cent.)	2,767,579 (0.3 per cent.)	2,697,999 (0.3 per cent.)	400,197 (0.1 per cent.)	99,545 (0.1 per cent.)
Gedling	591,515 (0.3 per cent.)	2,546,494 (0.2 per cent.)	2,545,633 (0.3 per cent.)	472,552 (0.1 per cent.)	123,235 (0.1 per cent.)
Mansfield	595,775 (0.3 per cent.)	5,007,145 (0.5 per cent.)	4,846,980 (0.5 per cent.)	327,347 (0.1 per cent.)	126,214 (0.1 per cent.)
Newark and Sherwood	727,530 (0.3 per cent.)	3,808,439 (0.4 per cent)	3,699,602 (0.4 per cent.)	810,254 (0.2 per cent.)	288,362 (0.2 per cent.)
Nottingham	1,025,521 (0.4 per cent.)	11,360,503 (1.1 per cent.)	10,744,316 (1.1 per cent.)	692,040 (0.2 per cent.)	224,148 (0.2 per cent.)
Rushcliffe	376,559 (0.2 per cent.)	1,578,363 (0.2 per cent.)	1,523,778 (0.2 per cent.)	1,011,437 (0.3 per cent.)	300,128 (0.3 per cent.)
Average claim per billing authority	642,076	2,803,279	2,721,311	1,038,251	327,869

[1] 90 per cent. of an authority's estimated claim for council tax transitional relief grant is paid during the relevant financial year, with any outstanding amounts paid in the following financial year.

Aquifers

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the annual rate of replenishment of chalk, limestone and sandstone aquifers in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980 and *(c)* 1990;

(2) what assessment he has made of run-off from the land as a proportion of the annual rainfall in England and Wales and by water authority for the year 1964, 1970, 1980 and 1990.

Mr. Atkins: The available data, which are not in precisely the form sought, are published annually in "Hydrological Data UK" by the Institute of Hydrology and the British Geological Survey.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underlay his decision to increase capping limits for county councils for 1995–96 by less than the predicted rate of inflation.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The considerations were set out in my right hon. Friend's statement on the local finance settlement on 1 December, *Official Report*, column *1333*.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the level of local government expenditure in Blyth Valley in each year since 1988.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is as follows:

Blyth Valley expenditure[1]

	£ 000
1988–89	6,375 (outturn)
1989–90	7,077 (outturn)
1990–91	8,153 (outturn)
1991–92	8,533 (outturn)
1992–93	8,570 (outturn)
1993–94	8,169 (outturn)
1994–95	8,304 (budget)

[1] Total Expenditure 1988–89 to 1989–90. Net Revenue Expenditure 1990–91 to 1994–95.

Rented Housing

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the average level of public, private and housing association rents for each year since 1979.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available information is given in the table:

Average rents in England, 1979–80 to 1993–94

Financial year	*Local authority rents*	*Calendar year*	*Housing association rents*[1]	*Private sector rents*[1]
1979–80	6.49	1979	n/a	n/a
1980–81	8.19	1980	n/a	n/a
1981–82	11.53	1981	n/a	n/a
1982–83	13.58	1982	n/a	n/a
1983–84	14.03	1983	n/a	n/a
1984–85	14.79	1984	n/a	n/a
1985–86	15.63	1985	n/a	n/a
1986–87	16.48	1986	20	24
1987–88	17.40	1987	24	26
1988–89	19.01	1988	23	29
1989–90	20.86	1989	22	31
1990–91	23.92	1990	27	43
1991–92	27.59	1991	30	51
1992–93	30.84	1992	37	55
1993–94	33.70	1993	38	63

[1] These figures are from the Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling error.

Tyne and Wear

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what impact the work of the Tyne and Wear development corporation has had on employment levels in the shipbuilding, ship repair, heavy engineering, offshore and mining industries in Tyne and Wear.

Sir Paul Beresford: Since its inception, the Tyne and Wear development corporation has made strenuous efforts to assist the shipbuilding, ship repair, heavy engineering, offshore and mining sectors. It has given support worth £3.1 million to companies and initiatives that have created or safeguarded 3,300 jobs in these sectors.

Water

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost of removing sediment and treating discoloured water in reservoirs in *(a)* the uplands and *(b)* the lowlands of England and Wales *(a)* in total and *(b)* by water authority in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Atkins: This information is not held centrally.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the absenteeism rate for his Department in each year since 1991.

Sir Paul Beresford: The table shows for each year the number of days lost through sick absence per member of staff and the percentage of the working days in the year which the days of absence represent.

Year	*Average days lost per member of staff*	*Percentage of working days lost*
1991	9.3	4.1
1992	9.5	4.2
1993	10.2	4.5
1994	9.0	4.0

The table excludes the staff of the Building Research Establishment, The Buying Agency, the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre and the Security Facilities Executive. The figures relate only to staff currently employed by the Department: information for staff who left the Department during the period is not readily available.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the absenteeism rate for the Buying Agency in each year since 1991.

Sir Paul Beresford: The information available is:

Year	*Percentage of working days lost through sick absences (Self Certified and Certified)*
1991	3.0
1992	3.6
1993	4.2
1994	3.4

Tenant Deposits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many tenants under the age of 21 years were unable to recover deposits from their former landlords in 1993 and 1994;

(2) how many students in full-time education were unable to recover tenant deposits in 1993 and 1994;

(3) how many took legal action against former landlords for non-repayment of tenant deposits in 1993 and 1994;

(4) how many landlords refused to return tenant deposits in 1993 and 1994;

(5) what assessment has been made of the number of tenant deposits that were not returned in 1993 and 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The arrangements for holding and return of deposits for private tenancies are for negotiation between the landlord and tenant at the outset of the tenancy. Although we are aware that problems with the return of deposits sometimes arise, we have no figures on the number of cases where deposits have been withheld or action has been taken.

Dioxins and Furans

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the contamination by *(a)* dioxins and *(b)* furans in each local government area in England and Wales; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Atkins: No assessment has been made by local government area, as this would be prohibitively expensive. However, a general assessment has been made of contamination, including dioxins and furans, in soil across England and Wales on a 50 km grid basis. This was published in November 1989 by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. A programme was also started in 1991 measuring various micropollutants in air, which includes dioxins and furans, in five towns and cities.

Private Rented Housing

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the demand of student rented housing on the availability of private rented housing for non-students.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. The composition of the private rented sector in any locality will be subject to the supply of property available and demand for it. As students comprise only 5 per cent. of households in privately rented accommodation, we have no reason to believe that demand for student housing is likely to make it more difficult for non-students to find accommodation except, perhaps, in a limited number of localities.

Housing in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many councils in England and Wales have introduced a registration scheme for houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Since 30 April 1991, when local authorities were given powers to charge for registering houses in multiple occupation, 49 councils in England have introduced registration schemes. Registration schemes do not necessarily cover the whole of an authority's area, but may be for a specified district. Records for the period prior to 30 April 1991 are incomplete, but we believe that there are a further 19 councils in England operating registration schemes.

The figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Energy Saving Trust

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has made of the income of the Energy Saving Trust in each year from 1994–95 to the year 2000, and for each year, the percentage of this income to be derived from each identifiable source;

(2) what estimate he has made of the percentage of the income of the Energy Saving Trust to be derived from levies on consumers' fuel bills in each year from 1994–95 levies on consumers' fuel bills in each year from 1994–95 to the year 2000;

(3) what estimate he has made of the expenditure of the Energy Saving Trust in each year from 1994–95 till the year 2000.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Energy Saving Trust is an independent company. The detailed financial implications of its contribution to the Government's climate change programme must properly be a matter for the trust.

Rents

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent paid by tenants of private landlords; and what were the equivalent figures for 1978–79 in actual and real terms.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The only figure available for 1978–79 is for median rent, and this measure is used for both years. Estimated private rents in England were a median of £48.50 a week in 1993–94 and £4.75 a week in 1978–79, the latter being equivalent to £13 a week at 1993–94 prices.

These estimates are from the 1993–94 survey of English housing and the 1978–79 private renters survey, and are subject to sampling error.

Housing Association

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many Housing Association properties have been built since 1979; how many of these have since been wholly sold to the tenant; how many are part-owned by the tenant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Housing associations built some 253,000 and rehabilitated 173,000 homes between 1979 and the end of June 1994. In the same period, associations sold some 81,500 properties outright to tenants, 28,400 on a shared-ownership basis, and 8,800 under the do-it-yourself shared ownership scheme. Some of these sales were of pre-1979 properties: separate figures for post-1979 properties are not available.

Albert Dock

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will own Albert dock after the Merseyside development corporation ceases to exist; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Merseyside development corporation is looking at a number of options for transferring the freehold. These include setting up a management company in which the freehold would be vested and management arrangements in which all long leaseholders, including the residents' association, would be involved.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed up by an application to join the company concerned.

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on offers of outside employment to staff below grade 3 is not recorded centrally in this Department. Since February 1993, no officer at grade 3 or above has reported such an offer, although three officers in these grades have applied under the business appointment rules to take up posts after retirement.

Air Quality

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to take to promote further improvement in air quality.

Mr. Gummer: I am publishing a wide-ranging statement of the Government's strategic policies for improving air quality at 9 am tomorrow, when copies will be placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House.

Environment Council

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 15 and 16 December 1994.

Mr. Gummer: I attended the Environment Council in Brussels on 15 and 16 December with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside. The Council reached a common position on the directive on polychlorinated biphenyls in a form acceptable to the United Kingdom. The Council decided by a qualified majority on a list of hazardous waste as required by directive 91/689. The UK and Italy voted against because the list contains wastes which, under certain circumstances, are not hazardous, and thereby contrary to the directive.

Council conclusions were agreed on a Community strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, which, inter alia, reflected the view reached at the European summit at Essen on the possibility of an optional carbon and energy tax. Council conclusions were also agreed on the preparation of an EU position for the first conference of the parties to the framework convention on climate change.

During the discussion of the Commission's annual report on the implementation of Community law my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside emphasised the need to consider the effectiveness of existing Community legislation in the real world and suggested that there should be an assessment of each piece of environmental legislation to see how successful it had been in meeting its objectives.

There were helpful discussions to prepare the EU position for the next meeting of the Commission for sustainable development and on the draft biocides

directive. Council conclusions were also agreed on transport and the environment following a useful debate during which I highlighted the very positive measures which the UK Government have already taken in this area.

Regional Enterprise Grants

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what resources will be available for the regional enterprise grants scheme in 1995–96.

Mr. Curry: The regional enterprise grant scheme will continue to operate on the basis of existing criteria in 1995–96 as part of the single regeneration budget. A maximum of £13.7 million will be available for existing and new commitments during the year.

EDUCATION

Pupil-to-teacher Ratios

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the pupil-to-teacher ratio as at January 1994 for each local education authority in *(a)* the primary sector, *(b)* the secondary sector and *(c)* overall.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is shown in the table.

Pupil:teacher ratios for maintained primary and secondary schools and overall in each local education authority in England—January 1994

LEA	Pupil:teacher ratio within schools: Primary (including grant-maintained)[1]	Secondary (including grant-maintained)[1]	Overall pupil:teacher ratio[2]
Corporation of London	15.0	N/A	14.3
Camden	20.5	15.3	16.2
Greenwich	21.0	16.4	17.3
Hackney	19.9	14.6	16.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	18.9	15.2	15.6
Islington	20.3	15.4	14.0
Kensington and Chelsea	17.7	12.5	14.5
Lambeth	19.1	14.8	15.8
Lewisham	21.5	16.2	17.0
Southwark	22.4	17.0	18.0
Tower Hamlets	18.0	14.2	14.6
Wandsworth	19.8	14.7	15.9
Westminster	17.6	15.5	14.2
Barking and Dagenham	22.1	17.1	18.2
Barnet	21.0	15.0	16.2
Bexley	23.5	16.5	18.7
Brent	22.0	15.9	17.6
Bromley	24.4	16.2	18.1
Croydon	21.8	16.9	17.9
Ealing	21.3	16.3	18.2
Enfield	22.5	16.6	18.0
Haringey	20.4	13.9	16.4
Harrow	20.5	15.7	17.3
Havering	23.1	16.5	18.0
Hillingdon	22.1	16.4	18.3
Hounslow	21.1	16.2	17.5
Kingston upon Thames	23.5	16.0	16.9
Merton	20.2	16.1	17.2
Newham	24.3	17.1	20.0
Redbridge	22.9	16.6	17.9
Richmond upon Thames	20.6	16.9	17.3
Sutton	24.4	16.9	18.7
Waltham Forest	21.9	15.9	17.9
Birmingham	23.3	16.3	18.1
Coventry	22.7	15.8	17.5

Pupil:teacher ratios for maintained primary and secondary schools and overall in each local education authority in England—January 1994

LEA	Pupil:teacher ratio within schools: Primary (including grant-maintained)[1]	Secondary (including grant-maintained)[1]	Overall pupil:teacher ratio[2]
Dudley	22.5	16.7	18.3
Sandwell	22.5	15.9	17.2
Solihull	23.3	16.4	17.8
Walsall	22.4	15.8	17.5
Wolverhampton	21.3	15.4	16.6
Knowsley	23.5	16.9	19.7
Liverpool	23.4	15.9	19.1
St. Helens	22.0	15.3	17.5
Sefton	23.2	16.4	18.3
Wirral	22.6	16.3	18.0
Bolton	22.0	16.1	17.9
Bury	23.4	17.1	19.4
Manchester	22.3	15.7	18.6
Oldham	22.9	15.6	18.2
Rochdale	24.3	16.9	19.3
Salford	23.7	16.6	19.5
Stockport	23.6	16.4	19.2
Tameside	24.9	17.4	20.0
Trafford	24.4	16.2	19.4
Wigan	22.9	15.8	17.8
Barnsley	24.2	17.1	19.1
Doncaster	23.5	16.3	18.2
Rotherham	21.3	15.8	17.5
Sheffield	22.4	16.5	18.3
Bradford	21.3	17.3	16.6
Calderdale	23.7	16.3	17.9
Kirklees	22.1	15.8	17.7
Leeds	23.4	16.0	18.6
Wakefield	23.1	16.3	18.6
Gateshead	21.6	15.7	16.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	22.9	16.5	18.5
North Tyneside	23.1	17.0	18.1
South Tyneside	23.2	17.0	18.6
Sunderland	22.1	16.1	17.8
Isles of Scilly	14.0	8.8	10.7
Avon	23.1	16.2	18.0
Bedfordshire	22.0	17.2	18.1
Berkshire	22.9	16.0	17.6
Buckinghamshire	23.0	16.8	18.6
Cambridgeshire	23.3	17.1	18.1
Cheshire	23.9	16.8	19.1
Cleveland	23.8	17.0	18.5
Cornwall	23.3	17.3	19.1
Cumbria	22.5	16.0	18.0
Derbyshire	23.3	15.7	17.7
Devon	22.9	16.4	18.8
Dorset	23.4	17.2	19.6
Durham	22.9	16.6	18.2
East Sussex	22.3	16.1	17.7
Essex	22.8	17.1	18.8
Gloucestershire	22.5	17.7	18.4
Hampshire	22.4	16.4	18.8
Hereford and Worcester	22.2	17.3	18.3
Hertfordshire	22.2	15.7	17.7
Humberside	24.3	17.5	19.2
Isle of Wight	22.3	17.6	17.4
Kent	23.9	16.7	18.7
Lancashire	23.0	16.1	17.8
Leicestershire	22.5	16.4	17.7
Lincolnshire	23.3	15.8	17.9
Norfolk	21.9	15.7	17.7
North Yorkshire	22.9	16.0	17.4
Northamptonshire	22.6	16.6	17.7[3]
Northumberland	24.3	18.1	18.8
Nottinghamshire	22.9	15.8	18.0
Oxfordshire	21.5	16.8	17.4
Shropshire	23.1	16.1	18.0
Somerset	22.6	16.6	17.6
Staffordshire	25.1	17.5	19.7
Suffolk	21.6	16.2	16.9

Pupil:teacher ratios for maintained primary and secondary schools and overall in each local education authority in England—January 1994

LEA	Pupil:teacher ratio within schools: Primary (including grant-maintained)[1]	Secondary (including grant-maintained)[1]	Overall pupil:teacher ratio[2]
Surrey	21.8	16.8	18.9
Warwickshire	22.1	16.1	17.7
West Sussex	22.0	16.5	17.9
Wiltshire	22.9	16.7	17.9
England	22.7	16.4	18.1[3]

[1] Excluding all unqualified teachers and teachers providing short term cover as well as teachers absent for a term or more but including the latter's qualified replacements, if any.
[2] The overall pupil:teacher ratio is measured across the three maintained school types—nursery, primary and secondary. The figures include all qualified teachers (including those not in schools and teachers providing short term cover), student teachers, instructors and licensed teachers employed by local education authorities.
[3] Includes an estimate of the full-time equivalent of teachers employed by Northamptonshire LEA.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her latest estimate of the number of surplus places in primary and secondary schools in *(a)* Nottinghamshire and *(b)* England.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on Friday 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *410–14*.

Book and Equipment Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent by each local education authority on books and equipment in 1993–94 prices in *(a)* 1979–80 and *(b)* 1993–94.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table sets out expenditure in 1993–94 prices by LEAs in England on books and equipment at LEA-maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in 1979–80 and 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available. These figures are drawn from LEAs' own returns of their expenditure to the Department of the Environment. Equivalent information is not available for grant-maintained schools.

Expenditure on books and equipment in 1979–80 and 1992–93 by LEA (in 1993–94 prices)

	Nursery, primary and secondary 1979–80 £000s	Nursery, primary and secondary 1992–93 £000s
ILEA	43,087	—
Corporation of London	0	24
Camden	0	1,702
Greenwich	0	1,526
Hackney	0	808
Hammersmith	0	847
Islington	0	1,232
Kensington and Chelsea	0	787
Lambeth	0	331
Lewisham	0	5,919
Southwark	0	1,856
Tower Hamlets	0	3,942
Wandsworth	0	1,251
Westminster	0	4,252
Barking	1,102	2,666
Barnet	2,431	3,990
Bexley	2,446	1,779
Brent	3,031	2,087
Bromley	2,418	1,919
Croydon	2,673	2,832
Ealing	2,488	1,626
Enfield	2,231	1,239
Haringey	2,240	365
Harrow	2,036	2,835
Havering	2,288	2,974
Hillingdon	2,171	2,167
Hounslow	1,791	2,970
Kingston upon Thames	920	1,189
Merton	1,301	2,166
Newham	2,623	3,043
Redbridge	1,877	3,377
Richmond upon Thames	897	1,269
Sutton	1,412	1,060
Waltham Forest	2,649	1,904
Birmingham	7,449	12,626
Coventry	2,961	3,060
Dudley	1,579	2,258
Sandwell	2,774	2,689
Solihull	1,587	3,169
Walsall	2,589	3,525
Wolverhampton	2,437	1,910
Knowsley	1,854	1,995
Liverpool	4,618	3,678
St. Helens	1,313	2,453
Sefton	2,533	3,227
Wirral	2,744	3,030
Bolton	2,397	4,104
Bury	1,676	1,837
Manchester	6,040	4,980
Oldham	2,042	3,263
Rochdale	2,112	1,641
Salford	2,305	440
Stockport	2,474	4,270
Tameside	1,847	2,587
Trafford	1,374	2,092
Wigan	2,882	4,157
Barnsley	2,117	2,945
Doncaster	3,034	0
Rotherham	1,818	2,612
Sheffield	5,141	4,561
Bradford	3,633	4,561
Calderdale	1,434	2,346
Kirklees	2,492	5,708
Leeds	4,689	6,001
Wakefield	2,419	3,238
Gateshead	1,934	2,511
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,744	2,492
North Tyneside	1,797	36
South Tyneside	2,115	1,797
Sunderland	3,005	3,874
Isle of Scilly	13	5
Avon	5,974	14,342
Bedfordshire	5,450	7,122
Berkshire	5,473	9,936
Buckinghamshire	4,890	7,700
Cambridgeshire	4,815	8,698
Cheshire	6,857	9,268
Cleveland	5,879	6,754
Cornwall	3,366	5,429

Expenditure on books and equipment in 1979–80 and 1992–93 by LEA (in 1993–94 prices)

	Nursery, primary and secondary 1979–80 £000s	*Nursery, primary and secondary 1992–93 £000s*
Cumbria	3,500	4,456
Derbyshire	7,425	8,759
Devon	6,253	12,447
Dorset	4,022	5,544
Durham	4,121	4,676
East Sussex	5,273	7,784
Essex	12,136	15,367
Gloucestershire	3,285	5,096
Hampshire	9,142	20,274
Hereford and Worcester	4,833	7,919
Hertfordshire	8,672	2,707
Humberside	7,847	11,924
Isle of Wight	1,090	1,420
Kent	13,196	9,135
Lancashire	9,734	20,806
Leicestershire	6,836	15,985
Lincolnshire	3,797	7,299
Norfolk	5,746	5,752
North Yorkshire	5,389	10,301
Northamptonshire	4,775	7,352
Northumberland	2,902	3,012
Nottinghamshire	8,477	11,989
Oxfordshire	5,165	6,560
Shropshire	2,782	1,007
Somerset	3,025	4,384
Staffordshire	10,261	11,643
Suffolk	4,542	16,827
Surrey	4,848	5,917
Warwickshire	3,133	6,230
West Sussex	5,476	10,129
Wiltshire	4,242	6,876
Total	406,716	522,438

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many staff in her Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Forth: Since February 1993, nine staff in this Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer, as required under the civil service management code. In each case, applications have been made to join the company concerned.

Ministerial Visits, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the purpose of her visit in March to Bradford city technology college; and if she will make a statement;

(2) if she will visit local authority schools when she visits Bradford in March;

(3) how many invitations to visit maintained schools in Bradford she has received since her appointment from *(a)* the hon. Member for Bradford, West and *(b)* Bradford local education authority; and what has been her response to those invitations;

(4) how many of *(a)* her predecessors, *(b)* Ministers from her Department and *(c)* other Ministers have visited Bradford city technology college since it opened.

Mr. Robin Squires: My right hon. Friend will be visiting Dixons city technology college in Bradford on 1 March. She likes to visit schools when time permits and this will be her first visit to a CTC. A programme for the day has yet to be settled but my right hon. Friend very much looks forward to visiting local authority schools if this can be arranged.

Between July and November last year, my right hon. Friend received three invitations from the hon. Member and three from the local authority to visit schools in Bradford. Other pressures ruled out an early visit to Bradford and many other parts of the country. My right hon. Friend did, however, meet the hon. Member and representatives of Bradford local education authority on 26 September in London and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) made a full day's visit to local authority schools in Bradford in November 1993.

Dixons city technology college opened in September 1990 and has been visited by two previous Secretaries of State for Education, including for the occasion of the official opening. It has also been visited by my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar).

Voluntary-aided Schools

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will update the table of underspending and overspending on grants to voluntary-aided schools published on 28 January 1994, *Official Report*, columns *413-14*, to include the relevant figures for 1993–94; what changes have been made to her Department's approval, monitoring and in-year reallocation procedures; to what extent such changes have contributed to any reduction in 1993–94 underspending; and whether there are reasons to expect either underspending or overspending to be reported for 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: Details of aided school capital and repair grant budget provision, final outturn and percentage of underspend or overspend for the years 1990–91 to 1993–94 are as follows:

Year	*Budget £ million*	*Outturn £ million*	*Per cent. under/overspend*
Repairs:			
1990–91	35	41.8	19 overspend
1991–92	47.5	49.1	3 overspend
1992–93	55	36.8	33 underspend
1993–94	48	37	23 underspend
Capital:			
1990–91	71	64	10 underspend
1991–92	84.2	63.9	24 underspend
1992–93	96.6	81.3	16 underspend
1993–94	84[1]	79.5	[1]3 underspend

[1] £2 million was transferred in year to GM schools capital budget to meet commitments for projects at voluntary aided schools which became grant-maintained during the year. The percentage rate of underspend shown is therefore based on a budget figure of £82 million.

A number of detailed changes have been introduced to the Department's internal procedures and these are being reviewed further in preparation for the introduction of a new computer system in the course of the next financial

year. Administrative work relating to the approval of building projects has been moved from London to Darlington and integrated with the work of grant allocation and monitoring. A series of seminars has been held to improve LEA and voluntary bodies' understanding of the grants system and procedures that they must follow. The comments of seminar delegates on the existing system are being taken into account. Detailed written guidance setting out procedures will shortly be issued to schools, LEAs and voluntary bodies.

In the current year the latest estimate is for a small overspend on the capital budget, balanced by a similar underspend on the repair budget, but my hon. Friend will be aware that a high proportion of grant falls to be paid near the end of the financial year.

Allowing for the fact that the expenditure is responsive to demand, I believe that the procedural changes introduced over the last two years have made an important contribution to the reduced underspend in 1993–94 and to the improvement which is in prospect for the current year.

Education Information

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to require privately operated schools *(a)* to provide and *(b)* to publish the same information as local authority schools are obliged to provide under the Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) direction 1994.

Mr. Forth: I am not aware of this direction. The proprietors of independent schools are required by the Education (School Performance Information) (England) Regulations 1994 to provide information identical to that provided by maintained schools for publication in the annual school and college performance tables.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the offence for which each prisoner, at present being held in a special secure unit, was sentenced;

(2) how long each prisoner who was held in a special secure unit in prisons in England and Wales on 10 January has been held in such a unit.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the offences for which each prisoner at present being held in a Special Secure Unit was sentenced and how long those prisoners had been held in such a unit.

The information on the eight prisoners currently held in Special Secure Units is given below:

Offences for which convicted	*Length of time in Special Secure Unit at 10 January 1995*
1. Attempted Murder and Robbery	2 years
2. Importation of Drugs	1 year 5 months
3. Attempted Murder and Conspiracy to Cause Explosions	1 years 3 months
4. Conspiracy to Cause Explosions and Possession of Firearms and Explosives	3 years and 1 month
5. Attempted Murder (2 counts) and Possession of Firearms	1 year 9 months
6. Possession of Explosives with Intent and Conspiracy to Cause Explosions	2 months
7. Armed Robbery (2 counts), Using a Firearm to Resist Arrest, Possession of a Firearm with Intent, and Assault with Intent to Resist Arrest	9 months
8. Possession of Firearms with Intent	1 year 10 months

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females remanded in custody in 1994 spent (i) up to one week, (ii) one to two weeks, (iii) two to four weeks, (iv) four to eight weeks, (v) eight weeks to three months, (vi) three to six months, (vii) six months to 12 months and (viii) over 12 months in prison before their case was concluded; how many were found not guilty in each section; and what were the figures for each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General for the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females remanded in custody in 1994 spent *(a)* up to one week, *(b)* one to two weeks, *(c)* two to four weeks, *(d)* four to eight weeks, *(e)* eight weeks to three months, *(f)* three to six months, *(g)* six months to 12 months and *(h)* over 12 months in prison before their court case was concluded; how many were found guilty in each section; and what were the figures for each year since 1990.

The readily available information is given in the attached tables, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. I regret that no information is available on the numbers found not guilty.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1990: by length of time since first reception[1]

England and Wales — *Number of persons*[2]

Length of time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment	*Males*	*Females*
All lengths	8,750	350
Less than 1 week	800	50
1 week	—	—
More than 1 week up to and including 1 month	2,000	100
More than 1 month up to and including 3 months	2,650	100
More than 3 months up to and including 6 months	2,050	100
More than 6 months up to and including 12 months	1,100	50
More than 12 months	200	—

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

[2] Rounded estimates which therefore may not add to the totals.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1991: by length of time since first reception[1]

England and Wales	*Number of persons*[2]	
Length of time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment	*Males*	*Females*
All lengths	8,900	400
Less than 1 week	1,000	50
1 week	10	—
More than 1 week up to and including 1 month	2,050	100
More than 1 month up to and including 3 months	2,850	100
More than 3 months up to and including 6 months	1,800	100
More than 6 months up to and including 12 months	1,000	50
More than 12 months	200	—

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

[2] Rounded estimates which therefore may not add to the totals.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1992: by length of time since first reception[1]

England and Wales	*Number of persons*[2]	
Length of time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment	*Males*	*Females*
All lengths	9,200	350
Less than 1 week	800	50
1 week	100	—
More than 1 week up to and including 1 month	1,850	50
More than 1 month up to and including 3 months	3,150	100
More than 3 months up to and including 6 months	2,000	50
More than 6 months up to and including 12 months	1,150	50
More than 12 months	200	—

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

[2] Rounded estimates which therefore may not add to the totals.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1993: by length of time since first reception[1]

England and Wales	*Number of persons*[2]	
Length of time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment	*Males*	*Females*
All lengths	10,250	400
Less than 1 week	850	50
1 week	150	—
More than 1 week up to and including 1 month	2,100	100
More than 1 month up to and including 3 months	3,250	150
More than 3 months up to and including 6 months	2,250	100
More than 6 months and up to and including 12 months	1,300	40
Over 12 months	400	10

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

[2] Rounded estimates which therefore may not add to the totals.

Remand prisoners in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1994: by length of time since first reception[1]

England and Wales	*Number of persons*[2]	
Length of time since first remand into a Prison Service establishment	*Males*	*Females*
All lengths	12,150	550
Less than 1 week	850	50
1 week	150	—
More than 1 week up to and including 1 month	2,150	100
More than 1 month up to and including 3 months	3,800	150
More than 3 months up to and including 6 months	2,550	100
More than 6 months up to and including 12 months	1,900	100
More than 12 months	750	50

[1] Time since first reception on remand into a Prison Service establishment. This includes any intervening time spent on bail, but excludes time spent in police cells beforehand.

[2] Rounded estimates which therefore may not add to the totals.

AIDS Advisory Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the recommendations made by the Prison Service AIDS advisory committee; and when he expects to respond.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about publishing the recommendations made by the Prison Service AIDS Advisory Committee.

The report of the Committee and its recommendations are extensive and require careful consideration. It is not yet possible to provide a response date.

A copy of the report will be placed in the Library of the House once decisions on the recommendations have been reached.

HM Prison, Everthorpe

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the recommended establishment of inmates that HM Prison, Everthorpe should hold; what it was when the prison was opened; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list by category the number of inmates held at HM Prison, Everthorpe on 2 January; what the figures were for each year since 1990: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matter has been delegated to the Director General for the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Everthorpe prison.

Everthorpe had previously held young offenders but was converted to hold 304 adult prisoners and re-opened in October 1991. In July 1994 a new education block was built and the original one converted into a hostel for up to 14 prisoners, bringing its

potential capacity to 318. Between 1991 and 1994 work to upgrade the accommodation, including installing toilets in cells, meant that on average about 75 per cent. of the cells were usable.

On 2 January this year there were 229 category C and 32 category D prisoners at Everthorpe. It is not possible to distinguish between those categories for earlier years. On the same date in each of the five years to 1994 the number of prisoners at Everthorpe was 344, 252, 169, 222 and 216 respectively.

The Home Secretary has already made a statement about Everthorpe prison in his speech of 10 January [Hansard Col. 31].

Drug Addicts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each metropolitan borough council in south Yorkshire, how many children were identified as drug addicts in each year since 1988 by type of drug; and what assessment he has made of the incidence of drug addiction amongst children in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the Misuse of Drugs (Notification of and Supply to Addicts) Regulations 1973, doctors are required only to notify the Home Office if they attend persons they know, or have reasonable grounds to suspect, are addicted to cocaine or any of 13 opiate drugs. Since 1988, the Home Office has received only one such notification from south Yorkshire—Rotherham—for a child under the age of 16 which referred to an addiction to cocaine.

Diamorphine

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many doctors currently prescribe diamorphine for drug addicts in each metropolitan borough council in south Yorkshire; and what were the figures for each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the provisions of the Misuse of Drugs (Notification of and Supply to Addicts) Regulations 1973, as amended, doctors may be licensed to prescribe diamorphine in the treatment of addiction. Currently available records, from 1991 only, indicate that no applications have been received from doctors in any of the south Yorkshire metropolitan borough councils.

Europol Database

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the legal status of the proposed Europol large database in The Hague; by whom and by what mechanism it is controlled; what transfers of United Kingdom information and data to Europol are proposed; what proposals there are for inaccurate data to be accessed, challenged and corrected; what legislation is required to facilitate United Kingdom involvement in the project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Europol drugs unit in The Hague is based on the ministerial agreement signed by Ministers of the interior and justice in Copenhagen in June 1993. It has no central database. Negotiations are continuing on the draft convention, which will establish the full Europol. A draft text was submitted for scrutiny on 17 November 1994.

Prison Riots

Mrs Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where and when riots have occurred in prisons, over the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what has been the cost of repairing damage caused and of relocating prisoners in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the occurrence of riots in prisons over the last ten years and the cost of repairing damage caused and of relocating prisoners in each case.

The number of disturbances since 1984 are shown in the table below:

Year	*Number*
1984–85[1]	38
1985–86	38
1986–87	45
1987–88	42
1988–89	67
1989–90	67
1990–91	105
1991–92	149
1992–93	142
1993–94	146
1994–13/1/95	96

[1] For this year only the figures are for a 15 month period.

The attached tables provide details of:

(a) the more serious disturbances since 1988; and

(b) the cost of building repair work

We have been able to obtain detailed information on disturbances before June 1988.

In some cases where serious damage was caused, the opportunity was taken to refurbish beyond merely repairing the damage caused by a disturbance. This might mean refurbishing a complete wing or, in the case of Manchester, refurbishment of the whole prison. Where this occurred, it is shown on the table.

The cost involved in transferring prisoners to other establishments as a result of a serious disturbance is not available centrally.

Prison	*Cost of damage £000*	*Comments*
20 June 1988 to 31 March 1989		
Hindley	0	
Haverigg	217.8	
Lindholme	100.8	
Northeye	0	Estimated cost £4.13m—prison closed
Whatton	0	
Canterbury	0	
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1990		
Spring Hill	0.5	
Risley	5,000	Cost of replacing/refurbishing wing
Brixton	0	
Kirklevington	10	
1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991		
Frankland	0	
Blundeston	3.2	
Manchester	25,000	Excludes full refurbishment costs
Bristol	2,600	
Cardiff	27.4	

Prison	Cost of damage £000	Comments
Pucklechurch	59.6	
Dartmoor	185.6	
Glen Parva	22.3	
Portland	0.7	
Stoke Heath	11.2	
Norwich	0	
Full Sutton	3.5	
Acklington	11.4	
Kirklevington	10	
Acklington	1.5	
Full Sutton	3	
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992		
Full Sutton	22	
Full Sutton	3	
Norwich	5	
Full Sutton	0	
Frankland	20	
Frankland	3	
Lindholme	15	
Moorland	196.1	
Brinsford	58	
Durham	19.7	
Kirklevington	20	
Haslar	0	
Nottingham	0	
Whitemoor	0	
Wymott	150	
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993		
Durham	5	
Full Sutton	164.8	Includes repairs from incident in 1991/92
Frankland	1	
Full Sutton	1.3	
Lindholme	3	
Holme House	6.3	
Moorland	22	
Dartmoor	0	
Highpoint	2.4	
Reading	145	
Wolds	5	
Whitemoor	2.5	
Acklington	5.2	
Parkhurst	19.8	
Leeds	75	
Full Sutton	6	
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994		
Wymott	5,000	Excludes costs of rebuilding wings
Whitemoor	17	
Wolds	23	
Haverigg	1	
Everthorpe	0	
Styal	1.3	
Acklington	1	
Bullingdon	1	
Whitemoor	0.6	
Blakenhurst	25	
Lindholme	2	
1 April 1994 to 13 January 1995		
The Verne	[illegible]	
Styal	2.3	
Haslar	0	
Highpoint	1.5	
Haslar	0	
Guys Marsh	0	
Everthorpe	130	Estimated
Everthorpe		
Swaleside	1	

Armed Response Units

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police authorities currently have armed response units;

(2) how many non-fatal injuries have resulted from the deployment of armed response units in each police authority area in each of the past five years;

(3) how many members of armed response units have been killed or injured in each police authority area in each of the last five years;

(4) how many deaths have resulted from the deployment of armed response units in each police authority area in each of the past five years;

(5) how many people have been killed or injured by police marksmen in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Maclean: The following information is available centrally. On 31 December 1993, 33 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales operated armed response vehicles. The number of people killed or injured as a result of shots fired by authorised police firearms officers, including armed response vehicle officers, in England and Wales between 1984 and 1993—figures for 1994 are not yet available—was as follows:

	Killed	Injured
1984	—	5
1985	2	2
1986	no deaths or injuries	
1987	5	6
1988	—	3
1989		
Metropolitan Police	2	—
1990		
Metropolitan Police	3	—
1991		
Cheshire	1	—
Northumbria	1	1
West Mercia	1	—
Metropolitan Police	—	1
1992		
Metropolitan Police	1	3
West Yorkshire	1	—
Suffolk	1	—
Durham	—	1
Surrey	—	1
Sussex	—	1
South Yorkshire	—	1

	Killed	Injured
1993		
Kent	—	1
Devon and Cornwall	1	—
Metropolitan Police	2	1

The number of Metropolitan police armed response vehicle officers injured during the first three years the force operated these vehicles were one in 1991, none in 1992 and two in 1993. None was killed. Corresponding figures are not centrally available for the rest of England and Wales although statistics for notifiable offences in which a police officer on duty was injured by a firearm are set out in table 3A of the published criminal statistics for England and Wales 1993, Cmnd 2680.

News International

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last two years immigration officials have visited or contacted the News International plant in Wapping; and what has been the outcome.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Details of contacts made with commercial organisations by the divisions and directorates in the immigration and nationality department of the Home Office are not collated centrally and the information requested is not, therefore available.

Immigration

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend his policy on family reunion for people granted exceptional leave to remain; and what representations he has received on this subject.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Representations have been received from the Refugee Council, United Nations Association and representatives of religious organisation, but we have no plans to amend our policy.

Police, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ratio of police officers to *(a)* population and *(b)* crimes in the Northumberland police authority area.

Mr. Maclean: The report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for 1993 gives a ratio of one police officer to every 399 persons in Northumbria.

Taking recorded crime for the year to June 1994 and force establishment at 30 June 1994, there were 58 crimes per police officer in Northumbria.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicides there were in prisons in each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General for the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about suicides in prison.

Table one below gives the number of self-inflicted deaths in prisons in England and Wales for the years 1990 to 1994 inclusive, and 1995 to 12 January.

Table One

Year	Number of deaths
1990	50
1991	42
1992	41
1993	47
1994	60
1995	3

Table two gives the breakdown of these figures by the verdict of the Coroners' Courts.

Table Two

Year	Suicide	Misadventure	Accidental death	No verdict	Open
1990	33	2	4	—	11
1991	33	2	2	—	5
1992	27	5	1	—	8
1993	35	1	—	4	7
1994	16	4	2	35	3
1995	—	—	—	3	—

Young Offenders, Northumberland

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* children aged eight to 15 years and *(b)* youths aged 16 to 20 years have been convicted of offences in south-east Northumberland in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: Information for the age groups 10 to 15 and 16 to 20 is given in the table. Children below the age of 10—the age of criminal responsibility—may not be found guilty of an offence.

Number of young persons found guilty in South East Northumberland magistrates' court and at the Crown Court by the committing South East Northumberland magistrates' court by age-group and type of offence 1989–1993

Year/Type of offence	Age-groups 10–15	16–20
1989		
Indictable offences	60	335
Summary non-motoring offences	12	286
Summary motoring offences	7	279
All offences	79	900
1990		
Indictable offences	39	327
Summary non-motoring offences	11	263
Summary motoring offences	2	294
All offences	52	884
1991		
Indictable offences	38	323
Summary non-motoring offences	13	204
Summary motoring offences	2	307
All offences	53	834

Number of young persons found guilty in South East Northumberland[1] magistrates' court and at the Crown Court by the committing South East Northumberland[1] magistrates' court by age-group and type of offence 1989–1993

Year/Type of offence	Age-groups 10–15	16–20
1992		
Indictable offences	49	352
Summary non-motoring offences	14	217
Summary motoring offences	1	337
All offences	64	906
1993		
Indictable offences	56	268
Summary non-motoring offences	15	162
Summary motoring offences	2	216
All offences	73	646

[1] From 1 April 1993 Blyth Valley, Morpeth Ward and Wansbeck Petty Sessional Divisions combined to form the South East Northumberland PSD. Data given for the years 1989 to 1992 and part 1993 is for the three PSDs combined.

Family Reunion Applications

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have at present applied for family reunion; and how many of these applications are from people who *(a)* have applied for asylum, *(b)* have been given exceptional leave to remain and *(c)* have been given refugee status.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on the number of applications for family reunion from persons seeking asylum, persons recognised as refugees and persons refused asylum but granted exceptional leave to remain is not available.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for granting family reunion for people on exceptional leave to remain and be given refugee status; what is the average wait for an application for family reunification; and how many applications are currently outstanding.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Persons who have been recognised as refugees in the United Kingdom are eligible to be joined immediately by their spouses and minor children under the family reunion concession. Applications are considered under the immigration rules, but maintenance and accommodation requirements which are applied to other immigration cases, are waived for refugees.

Applications for family reunion from the spouse and minor children of a person on exceptional leave will usually be granted after four years, subject to the general requirements of the immigration rules on the admission of spouses and dependants, including those relating to maintenance and accommodation. An application for family reunion may be granted earlier if there are compelling compassionate circumstances. Information on the average wait for an application for family reunification and the number of applications outstanding is not available.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals in Great Britain" for *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994 will be published.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Command Paper "Statistics of Scientific Procedures performed on living animals, Great Britain, 1993" is to be published on 26 January. The next similar Command Paper, containing information relating to scientific procedures started in 1994, is expected to be published towards the end of July 1995.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will define the categories of experiments on living animals which would fall within the most severe classification; how many applications for licensed experiments for *(a)* medical and *(b)* non-medical were under the most severe classifications; and how many applications for experiments in each security category were made in 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Scientific procedures are regarded as being of substantial severity if they result in a major departure from the animal's usual state of health or well-being. These are likely to include acute toxicity procedures where significant morbidity or death is the end point, some efficacy tests of antimicrobial agents and vaccines, some models of disease, and major surgery where significant post-operative suffering may result.

In 1993, project licence applications in each severity category were submitted: mild, 614; moderate, 743; substantial, 21; unclassified, terminally anaesthetised or decerebrated animals, nine.

Fourteen of the licences assessed as of overall substantial severity were relevant to human medicine, one to veterinary medicine and six to non-medical topics.

Election Fraud

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to improve election processes to reduce the possibility of fraud.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A review established after the 1992 general election has identified a number of detailed improvements in election procedures, including improvements aimed at reducing the possibility of fraud. As a result of this work, new absent voting application forms have been produced to reduce the risk of fraudulent proxy appointments. We have no proposals for further changes.

Family Reunion Policies

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the latest developments regarding harmonisation of family reunion policies across the EU.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: EC immigration Ministers agreed the terms of a resolution on the harmonisation of family reunification policies in Copenhagen in June 1993. There have been no developments since then.

Public Houses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many licensed public houses there were in *(a)* North Yorkshire *(b)* South Yorkshire, *(c)* West Yorkshire, *(d)* Humberside and *(e)* the United Kingdom for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The available information by county is given in the table. This information is collected only every three years for each licensing area in England and Wales. Figures are produced and published for each county for the year of collection along with a total for England and Wales for the previous year.

Public houses, etc.[1] licensed for the retail sale of intoxicating liquor, as at 30 June 1983 to 1992

	1982	1983	1985	1986	1988	1989	1991	1992
Humberside	—	941	—	1,020	—	1,105	—	1,143
North Yorkshire	—	1,657	—	1,678	—	1,714	—	1,757
South Yorkshire	—	1,472	—	1,462	—	1,508	—	1,505
West Yorkshire	—	2,673	—	2,796	—	2,883	—	2,889
England and Wales	68,373	69,136	70,331	71,200	71,875	72,712	74,229	74,053

[1] Includes public houses and hotels etc. (other than those licensed under Part IV of the Licensing Act 1964) having a justices' on-licence which authorises the sale of intoxicating liquor for consumption on or off the premises, unless a condition is attached to the licence prohibiting off-sales.

Drugs, Blyth Valley

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what strategies he is currently promoting to tackle drug problems in Blyth valley; and if he will make it his policy to introduce further measures.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's overall strategy for tackling drug misuse is aimed at reducing the supply of and demand for drugs throughout the United Kingdom. From 1 April, the area covered by the local drugs prevention team in Newcastle is being extended to the whole of Northumberland and Tyne and Wear, including Blyth valley.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on access to travel documents for asylum seekers granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom; what representations he has received about access to travel documents; and what is the average wait to obtain such documents.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I am satisfied that the policy on access to travel documents for asylum seekers granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom, which was introduced on 1 January 1994, allows those who cannot obtain a passport from their own authorities to be issued with such documents. I receive a number of representations from hon. Members, representative organisations and individuals about particular cases. A wide variety of factors influences the time taken to issue travel documents. However, applications on which no further enquiries are necessary are generally completed within eight weeks of receipt in the immigration and nationality department.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what arrangements he has with the French authorities to return to France persons refused asylum in the United Kingdom on safe third country grounds;

(2) what arrangements he has with the German authorities to return to Germany persons refused asylum in the United Kingdom on safe third country grounds.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There is close liaison with the French and German authorities over the return of persons refused asylum on safe third country grounds in accordance with the immigration rules.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations has been given by his Department and other interested Government Departments to the establishment of a national agency to manage the custody and supervision of persistent juvenile offenders as recommended in the sixth report of the Home Affairs Committee (HC 441) of Session 1992–93.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office is considering this recommendation against the background of charges to the law on juvenile offenders contained in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications have been lodged with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority since 1 April 1994;

(2) what has been the administrative cost of considering all applications to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority since 1 April 1994;

(3) how many awards have been made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority since 1 April 1994; and in which of the tariff bands those awards fell.

Mr. Maclean: In the period 1 April 1994 to 12 January 1995, 49,065 applications were registered by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

Total expenditure on administration of the compensation scheme in the period 1 April 1994 to 31 December 1994 was £11.1 million. It is not possible, at this time, to give a breakdown of that expenditure as between CICB, in respect of applications received before 1 April 1994 CICA, in respect of applications received on or after 1 April 1994 and the appeals panel.

CICA offered the following awards in the period 1 April 1994 12 January 1995:

Band	*Awards offered*
1	320
2	67
3	330
4	23
5	131
6	43
7	190
8	39
9	20
10	22
11	15
12	69
13	4
14	1
15	2
16	11
17	3
19	1
25	1
Total	1,292

Director General of the Prison Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how performance-related pay bonuses for the Director General of the Prison Service are calculated; and by whom.

Mr. Howard: The performance of the Director General of the Prison Service is assessed on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative measures. They reflect the Prison Service's key targets, as set out in the agency's corporate and business plans, copies of which are in the Library. The details of the arrangements for assessing the performance of the Director General are personal to him and I have no plans to publish them. I decide what performance bonus the Director General should receive on advice from the Permanent-Secretary of the Department.

Immigration Detainees

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost to the Home Office in the financial year 1993–94 of detaining persons under Immigration Act powers; and if he will provide a breakdown of these costs.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The total cost to the immigration service of running its detention accommodation in the financial year 1993–94 was £7,466,352. This comprises:

	£
Detention, escort and related costs paid to contractors	5,132,900
Running costs, including accommodation charges	1,065,106
IS staff costs	912,454
Capital expenditure	355,892

Information about the costs of immigration detention in police cells and Prison Service establishments is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the number of asylum seekers currently detained under Immigration Act powers by *(a)* nationality, *(b)* gender, *(c)* length of detention, *(d)* place of detention and *(e)* immigration status at the time of application.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: At 13 January 1995, a total of 572 people who had sought asylum were detained. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following refusal of the application, as well as those whose application was under consideration or subject to appeal. Of this figure, 138 had been in detention less than one month, 97 between one and two months, 237 between two and six months and 100 had been in detention longer than six months.

Information on the gender, immigration status, nationality and location of detention is given in tables A - B and C.

Table A: Number of people detained on 13 January 1995, who had sought asylum, by immigration status and gender.

Immigration status	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Port case	285	20	305
Illegal entrant case	202	8	210
Deportation case	50	7	57
Total	537	35	572

Table B: Number of people detained as at 13 January 1995 who had sought asylum, by nationality

	Number detained
Afghanistan	1
Albania	7
Algeria	63
Angola	9
Bangladesh	16
Cameroon	3
China	19
Colombia	6
Cyprus (TRNC)	16
Dominica	1
Ecuador	2
Egypt	1
Eritrea	1
Estonia	1
Ethiopia	3
Gambia	3
Georgia	1
Ghana	60
Guyana	1
India	61
Iran	2
Iraq	2
Ivory Coast	9
Jamaica	4
Kenya	6
Lebanon	5
Liberia	4
Libya	4
Malawi	1
Mauritius	3
Morocco	7
Mozambique	1
Niger	2
Nigeria	119
Pakistan	32
Peru	1
Poland	1
Romania	10
Russia	3
Sierra Leone	10
Somalia	1
South Africa	5
Sri Lanka	9
Sudan	5
Trinidad and Tobago	1
Tunisia	1
Turkey	20
Uganda	2
Former Yugoslavia	7
Zaire	17
Zimbabwe	1
Nationality doubtful	2
Total	572

Table C: Number of people detained as at 13 January 1995, who had sought asylum, by location of detention

	Number detained
Immigration service establishment	
Campsfield House	145
Gatwick Beehive	10
Harmondsworth	97
Manchester airport detention suite	1
Queens building	20
Stansted	6
Newhaven	2
Dover Harbour Board	7
Holmhouse detention centre	1

Table C: Number of people detained as at 13 January 1995, who had sought asylum, by location of detention

	Number detained
Prison service establishment	
Armley	6
Belmarsh	2
Birmingham	28
Brinsford	4
Bristol	2
Brixton	13
Bullingdon	2
Cardiff	1
Chelmsford	1
Crumlin Road	2
Dorchester	1
Edinburgh	1
Elmley	3
Erlestoke House	1
Exeter	2
Feltham YC centre	1
Greenock	4
Haslar	85
Highdown	3
Hindley remand centre	2
Holloway	1
Leicester	1
Lewes	2
Maidstone	1
Manchester	5
Norwich	3
Pentonville	2
Risley	1
Rochester	59
Wandsworth	3
Winchester	3
Winson Green	3
Wolds remand prison	2
Wormwood scrubs	7
Police cells	26
Total	572

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many escaped prisoners are currently at large.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of escaped prisoners currently at large.

This information has only been recorded centrally since 20 June 1988. From that date to 13 January this year (inclusive) 123 prisoners who escaped are still unlawfully at large.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many escaped prisoners from prisons in the Greater London regions are currently at large; how long each has been at large; what offences each has been convicted of; from which prison each escaped; and whether each has escaped before.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners who have escaped from prisons in the Greater London area and who are still currently at large; their offences; the prisons from which they escaped; the length of time they have been at large and whether those prisoners had escaped before.

The information you request has only been recorded centrally since 20 June 1988. The table below gives the relevant details of the seven prisoners who escaped between 20 June 1988 and 13 January this year (inclusive) and who are still at large:

Date of escape	*Establishment*	*Offence*	*Length of time at large*
17 November 1989	Feltham	Burglary	5 years 2 months
2 February 1992	Downview	Importation of Drugs	2 years 11 months
8 November 1992	Downview	Importation of Drugs	2 years 2 months
4 September 1993	Downview	Importation of Drugs	1 year 4 months
23 October 1993	Feltham	Robbery	1 year 3 months
30 August 1994	Downview	Robbery	4 months
1 January 1995	Wandsworth	Burglary	2 weeks

Information on whether any of them had previously escaped is not recorded centrally.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Howard: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. Details of the number of offers received by staff below grade 3 are not recorded centrally. Staff in these grades are required only to report any offers—and, in the case of procurement and contracts staff, any approaches—received from prospective employers to a senior member of staff at least two grades higher.

Since February 1993, there have been 10 applications under the business appointment rules by Home Office staff for permission to take up offers of employment from outside employers on leaving Crown service. In the same period, three additional members of staff reported offers of employment which did not require an application under the rules. In each case, the report was followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Crime Victims (Compensation)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the totals of compensation paid to the victims of crime in each of the past 10 years; and what he expects it to be in each of the next three years.

Mr. Maclean: The amounts of compensation paid under the criminal injuries compensation scheme in the

last 10 years, and the forecast expenditure in the next three years are as follows:

Year	Compensation paid/payable £ million
1984–85	35
1985–86	42
1986–87	48
1987–88	52
1988–89	69
1989–90	73
1990–91	109
1991–92	144
1992–93	152
1993–94	165
1994–95	178
1995–96	180
1996–97	142
1997–98	144

It is expected that by the year 2000–01 the amount of compensation payable will exceed £200 million.

Electric Shock Equipment

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Royal Ordnance possesses or has possessed a section 5 permit allowing it to hold electric shock weapons.

Mr. Maclean: Electric shock weapons are covered by section 5(1)*(b)* of the Firearms Act 1968, as amended, which prohibits the unauthorised possession of any weapon of whatever description designed or adapted for the discharge of any noxious liquid, gas or other thing. Royal Ordnance holds authority under section 5(1)*(b)* of the 1968 Act. The terms of this authority are currently under review.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), *Official Report*, 20 December, columns *1213–14*, what was the voting record of each member state on items agreed at the meeting of the European Community's Justice and Home Affairs Council held on 30 November and 1 December; and if he will make it his practice to include details of all votes in future.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The items agreed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council were adopted by unanimity, in accordance with the relevant provision of title VI of the treaty on European Union. Although there are possibilities under title VI for the Council to decide procedural matters and certain implementing measures by majority voting, substantive matters can be decided only by unanimity.

Disturbance (Everthorpe)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the findings of the report on the disturbances at Everthorpe on 2 and 3 January; and if will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have today placed in the Library a summary of the findings and the conclusions of the report together with a report of the action that is being taken in response.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 7 December, *Official Report*, columns *265-66*, what was the number and cost of *(a)* first–class tickets, *(b)* business–class tickets and *(c)* economy–class tickets for overseas flights paid for by the Overseas Development Administration in each of the last three years.

Mr. Goodlad: The details for overseas flights in respect of ODA in 1993 and 1994 are:

Class of travel	Number	Cost £
1993		
First Class	13	45,400
Business Class	800	717,291
Economy Class	57	28,403
1994 (January to October)		
First Class	12	28,661
Business Class	628	576,375
Economy Class	41	18,597

For travel in 1992, it is not possible to provide a breakdown by class and mode of travel, nor is it possible to distinguish between overseas and domestic travel. Total expenditure on official travel by UK–based Ministers and officials in the ODA that year was £791,094.

The proportion of business class flights reflects the long-distance nature of much of ODA's travel.

WALES

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Redwood: I am responsible for Cadw and Welsh historic monuments and I have joint responsibility for the planning inspectorate and ADAS agencies, as set out in the published framework documents.

Suckler Cow Premiums

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date the Welsh Office agriculture department released the first suckler cow premiums advance subsidy cheques to Welsh farmers.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: On 24 November 1994.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the reasons for the problems experienced by the Welsh Office Agriculture

Department in the payment of suckler cow premium during 1994 and the particularly long delays for Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Delays in making payments for the 1993 scheme were due to the establishment of a new computer system, when the making of payments was transferred from the MAFF centre at Guildford to the Welsh Office.

Payments under the 1994 scheme commenced in November 1994.

Business Rates

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the likely increase in business rates in Wales arising from the five-year review announced in the Chancellor's Budget speech.

Mr. Redwood: The estimated average increase in 1995–96 rate bills for property on the local rating list is 4 per cent.

VAT (Tourism)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement of the effect on jobs, rural energy and areas dependent on tourism of the extension of VAT to cover tourism activities and entrance fees to tourist sites.

Mr. Redwood: The application of VAT is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who announced on 29 November that services relating to entertainment or recreational activities and car parking at airports, which include passenger transport, will become wholly standard rated. The measure will affect a limited range of businesses in Wales.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 rules regarding transfer of council employees to reorganised local authorities apply to all county and district councils in Wales; what representations he has received on the matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Whether or not the TUPE regulations apply depends on the circumstances of each case. My hon. Friend and I have made it clear on a number of occasions that we will include in the staff transfer order staff whose contracts of employment are considered to be protected under TUPE, but that we do not believe that all local government staff will fall into this category.

The staff commission for Wales wrote to me on 8 December suggesting that, in order to ensure equal treatment of employees of county and district councils, all staff who wish to transfer should be transferred. My hon. Friend and I have received a large number of representations from hon. Members, councils and others in support of the staff commission's letter.

We hope to give our response shortly.

"People and Prosperity: A Challenge to Wales"

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on measures taken to implement the proposals of the Welsh Office document "People and Prosperity: A Challenge to Wales".

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend will publish an action plan early this year to follow up "People and Prosperity". This will set out the action needed to raise standards, make faster progress towards the national targets for education and training and promote a culture of learning and enterprise.

Departmental Creche Facilities

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new plans he has to provide creche facilities to staff in his Department.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 10 January 1995 *Official Report*, column *50*.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Redwood: Since February 1993, three staff in my Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer and each was followed by an application to join the company concerned.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *367*, if he will now publish information for 1993–94 on general practitioner fundholders savings.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The amount retained for the financial year 1993–94 was £4,470,000. This will be used by general practitioner fundholders for the benefit of their patients.

NHS Redundancy Payments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost of redundancy payments to NHS staff in each of the last five years.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Gross redundancy payments to NHS staff

	£000
1992–93	1,496
1991–92	984
1990–91	254
1989–90	84
1988–89	108

Source:

Health authority financial returns. Pembrokeshire NHS Trust financial returns (1992–93 only)

Note:

1992–93 figures are latest available. As from 1993–94 the information is not held centrally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Fraud

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amount of money was recovered through investigations into social security fraud in the last financial year; and how many staff were employed on these duties.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of fraud work is a matter for Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Simon Hughes, dated 17 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the amount of money recovered through fraud investigations in the last financial year and the staff employed on these duties.

Over 3,000 staff are involved in the investigation of benefit fraud.

Estimated benefit savings, from fraud identified and stopped during 1993–94, were £654m. The value of overpaid benefit actually recouped, including fraud cases, totalled £80m. Information relating to the amount of benefit recovered directly as a result of anti-fraud work is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Fraud Allegations

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will total the number of instances where information from non-custodial parents alleging social security fraud by the parent with care has *(a)* been reported to the Child Support Agency and *(b)* been referred to the Benefits Agency for action; and what has been the outcome of these investigations, in respect of each three months of the CSA's existence.

Mr. Burt: It is not a business requirement of the Child Support Agency to keep statistics centrally on allegations of benefit fraud as any such allegation is referred to the Benefits Agency for investigation. Statistics provided by the BA on the numbers of cases referred by the CSA and those investigations which subsequently yielded a weekly benefit saving are as follows:

	April–June 1994	*July–September 1994*	*October–November 1994*[2]	*Total April–November 1994*
Referrals[1]	2,897	2,664	2,049	7,610
Cases yielding WBS	1,131	1,086	748	2,961
Percentage	39	41	37	39

[1] No information is kept on the origins of an allegation eg: Absent Parent, Parent with Care or other.
[2] Two months only.

Doncaster and Mexborough Benefit Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many invalidity benefit awards have been *(a)* reviewed, *(b)* disallowed following review and *(c)* reinstated on appeal during the last 12 months in each of the Doncaster and Mexborough area Benefits Agency offices.

Mr. Hague: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 17 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Invalidity Benefit (IVB) awards in Doncaster and Mexborough.

The Benefits Agency (BA) Doncaster District comprises Doncaster West District Office (DO) and Doncaster East Benefit Office (BO). Reviews of IVB cases appropriate to the Doncaster District are centralised at Doncaster West DO.

Mexborough BO is part of the BA Rother and Dearne District which comprises Rotherham South DO and Goldthorpe, Mexborough and Rotherham North BO's. Reviews of IVB cases for customers dealt with by Mexborough BO are dealt with at that office.

The information requested is provided in the following table:

IVB awards reviewed between 1 January and 31 December 1994

Office	*IVB awards reviewed and disallowed*	*IVB awards reinstated on appeal*
Doncaster DO	616	126
Mexborough BO	260	55

Requests for review were received by the Adjudication Officer (AO) in 707 cases at Doncaster and 383 at Mexborough. Of those cases, the AO decided that in 91 cases at Doncaster and 123 at Mexborough the requirements for entitlement to IVB were still satisfied and IVB should not be reviewed. However, in the remaining cases the AO decided that the award of IVB should be reviewed and disallowed.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the full costs of the Government's current campaign on disability; and if he will break down the expenditure by category of advertisement and publication.

Mr. Hague: The total cost of the recent public awareness campaign was £1 million, broken down as follows:

Break down of expenditure	
Advertising	
Posters	£490,000
Press	£310,000
Insertion appear in:	
Daily Star	Daily Mirror
Daily Express	Daily Mail
Today	The Sun
The Guardian	The Independent
Daily Telegraph	The Times
News of the World	Sunday Mirror
The People	Sunday Express
Mail on Sunday	The Observer
Sunday Telegraph	Sunday Mail

Break down of expenditure	
Publications	
You and Disability leaflet	£76,000
Braille and audiotape	£2,000
Marketing/distribution	£44,000
Research	£78,000

Note:
The Costs of individual press insertions are negotiated individually by our advertising agency and are commercial in confidence.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of disabled people in the United Kingdom; how that figure is arrived at; when it was last calculated and by what method; when he plans to update the figure; and what definition of disabled people is used for the calculation of these figures.

Mr. Hague: All the information is contained in the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys, surveys on disability in Great Britain published between September 1988 and July 1989, copies of which are held in the Library. No date has been set for a further survey.

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of pensioners who are in receipt of *(a)* income support and *(b)* housing benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

	Number
Income Support recipient with pensioner premiums	1,492,000
Housing Benefit recipients with pensioner premiums	1,977,000

Notes:
— some 900,000 Income Support recipients will also be in receipt of Housing Benefit.
— Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
— a case is defined as being a pensioner if in receipt of the pensioner premium, higher pensioner premium or enhanced pensioner premium.
Source:
Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry May 1993.
Housing Benefit Management Information Statistics May 1993.

Income Support

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances payments of income support are made to persons under 18 years of age; how many such recipients are currently recorded; and what is the average weekly payment to such persons.

Mr. Roger Evans: Young people aged 16 and 17 can claim income support at any time if their circumstances exempt them from the availability for work rules. In addition those who have ceased compulsory education and of necessity have to live independently from their family because they are estranged can claim in the period that their parents would have received child benefit. The young person is required to register unemployed with the Employment Service and for work or training opportunities with the careers service.

Outside the child benefit period, the temporarily sick with supporting medical evidence can claim until fit for work or training, as can recently discharged offenders who are estranged from their family for up to eight weeks, provided they are registered for work and training.

Further, the Secretary of State may direct that income support be paid to any registered young person who is not entitled under the above rules but who would be at risk of unavoidable severe hardship if benefit were withheld. Income support would normally be paid until a job or a Government training place is secured.

The number of income support recipients aged under 18 is 36,000 and the average weekly amount paid is £36.79.

Source: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1994 (sample survey of 1/20 cases). The figure is rounded to the nearest thousand.

Housing Benefit

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance he will be issuing to local authorities on implementation of the new housing benefit provisions.

Mr. Roger Evans: Details of the changes announced in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's uprating statement on 30 November 1994 were issued to all local authorities in mid-December. Officials are currently discussing the housing benefit proposals with the local authority associations before preparing regulations and detailed guidance, which will be issued to all authorities nearer to the October 1995 implementation date.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Hague: Staff in the Department are required to report job offers to a senior officer at least two grades higher but no such records are kept centrally.

Records that are kept relate to staff who have made an application to take up an outside business appointment. The total for the Department since February 1993 is six.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the actual expenditure total for his Department for the combined years from 1990–91 to 1995–96 in 1994 prices; and what is his estimate of total expenditure assuming that unemployment from 1990–91 to 1995–96 had remained constant at the average unemployment level of 1990–91.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. such information as is available is in the following tables.

Actual expenditure total for Department of Social Security

£ millions

Year	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93
Amount (1994–95 prices)	69,206	75,451	82,975

Estimated expenditure if unemployment remained constant at 1990–91 level

£ millions

Year	1991–92	1992–93
Amount (1994–95) prices	75,218	82,594

1. The data source is the Government Expenditure Plans 1990–91 to 1992–93 (CM 1014) and the 1994 Departmental Report.
2. 1992–93 is the latest year for which the actual outturn figures are available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Jack: My Department has not granted preferred carrier status to any airline.

Fisheries

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) on 10 January, *Official Report*, columns *21-22*, if he will make available fuller details of the agreement that was reached on the integration of Spain and Portugal into the common fisheries policy.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Council reached agreement on the basis of documents prepared by the German presidency. It is the intention that legal instruments embodying the agreement should be issued as soon as possible. These will be made available to the House in the usual way. However, in order to facilitate hon. Members' consideration of the matter, I have placed copies of the substance of the agreement in the Library of the House.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement about the offence which will be committed by a Spanish vessel fishing for non–precious stocks in the North sea as a full participant in the common fisheries policy after 1 January 1996;

(2) for what reasons he informed fishermen in his letter after the December Fisheries Council that the exclusion of Spanish fishermen from the North sea would continue unaffected.

Mr. Jack: The recent negotiations on Spain and Portugal confirmed that Spain has acquired no fishing rights in the North sea after 1 January 1996. The decisions reached at the December Fisheries Council on Spanish and Portuguese integration in the common fisheries policy apply only to those waters referred to in their act of accession west of 4 deg west and the English channel. Council regulation 1275/94, article 4, adopted by the Fisheries Council last April, provides a possibility for the Commission to make a proposal granting Spain access to other waters, including the North sea, for non–quota species taking account of track record in a recent and representative period. However, unless and until such a proposal is made, and a Council decision taken on it, it will remain an offence for Spain to fish in the North sea.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what system of reporting is proposed by him for Spanish vessels fishing in the Irish box as a result of the December Fisheries Council agreement; what plans he has for reporting in person to the coastal state on arrival and departure; to whom the vessels will report; and what co-ordination will be developed with Irish authorities.

Mr. Jack: Further to the agreement reached at the December Fisheries Council, detailed plans for the implementation of control measures for the Irish box from 1 January 1996 have still to be developed. These, along with other matters, will be the subject of consultation with the fishing industry and other interested parties.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fishermen in *(a)* Grimsby, *(b)* Hull and *(c)* the south-west were sent his letter of explanation after the Fisheries Council; and how the fishermen who received it were selected.

Mr. Jack: My letter explaining the outcome of the December Fisheries Council was sent to recipients of all currently valid licences issued by my Department for fishing vessels over 10m based in England and Wales. At the time that the letter was sent, there were 1,483 such vessels. A separate breakdown of the number of letters sent to people in particular areas could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Waldegrave: Precise details of the responsibilities and relationships are set out in the various agency framework documents, copies of which are in the Library of the House. In broad terms, agency chief executives report directly to me. Detailed arrangements are in place for the performance of each agency to be monitored through its ownership board which is chaired by a senior official in the core Department.

Veal

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what has been the production of veal in the United Kingdom in each year since 1985;

(2) what has been the consumption of veal in the United Kingdom for each year since 1985.

Mr. Jack: Details of veal production and the veal available for consumption are given in the table.

UK Veal Production and Consumption 1985 to 1993

	Production[1] '000 tonnes	Available for consumption[2] '000 tonnes
1985	5.3	8.1
1986	3.7	6.5
1987	3.2	4.2
1988	1.9	2.8
1989	1.4	1.4

UK Veal Production and Consumption 1985 to 1993

	Production[1] *'000 tonnes*	*Available for consumption*[2] *'000 tonnes*
1990	1.9	2.6
1991	2.0	3.6
1992	1.4	2.4
1993[3]	0.8	n/a

[1] The meat produced from calves—under 127 kg dressed carcase weight—slaughtered in the United Kingdom.
[2] Production plus imports of veal minus exports of veal—excluding live exports.
[3] It is no longer possible to identify separately imports and exports of veal.
Source:
MAFF

Mr. David Uren

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his review of procedures with regard to the application of the rules of the farm woodland premium scheme as they relate to the growing of coppice by Mr. David Uren.

Mr. Jack: Our legal advice is that the rules of the farm woodland premium scheme, as set out in statutory instrument 1992 No. 905, do not allow for any land converted to woodland to be managed as coppice. We have therefore reviewed the scheme rules and procedures booklet and the standing instructions to the Ministry's regional organisation on administering the scheme, to ensure that this provision is clear and is being applied consistently. The question of whether this rule or other details of the scheme should be changed can be considered as part of the review of the scheme which will begin later this year.

Harvesting Restrictions

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Union regarding the harvesting restrictions imposed on crops grown on land which is coming out of set-aside provision.

Mr. Jack: Marketable food crops can only exceptionally be sown on set-aside land and the clear intention, supported by the text, of both EC and United Kingdom legislation is that the facility can be used only for crops sown for harvesting the following year. No reference to EU authorities is necessary in this case.

Calves

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many dairy calves have been exported from the United Kingdom in each year since 1985;

(2) how many live calves have been exported each year from 1985 *(a)* for veal production and *(b)* in total.

Mrs. Browning: The available information, relating to exports from Great Britain, was given in my answer to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 12 January, *Official Report*, columns *208-10.* It is not possible to say what numbers were destined for veal production, or what numbers originated from dairy herds.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what measures were taken for the welfare and alternative transport of calves waiting for export at Coventry airport delayed due to the crash on 21 December 1994 of the transport aircraft,

(2) what reports he has received of calves that died between 1 and 10 January while awaiting export.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The Department is aware of 1,587 calves that were intended to be flown out of Coventry on the day of the air crash or the day following; four exporters were involved.

Our information on these calves is derived from welfare inspections carried out by Ministry veterinary staff at premises where animals were subsequently held, from inspection carried out for certification purposes in relation to animals eventually presented for export and from information obtained from the animals' owners.

Following the unforeseen unavailability of the air route out of Coventry, alternative plans to export some of the calves on the Shoreham-Dieppe route were frustrated or delayed when the opening of the route was delayed first by bad weather and then by demonstrations.

Around 1,070 of the animals were sooner or later retained or sold for rearing in the United Kingdom; 435 were exported through Shoreham on 6 January and Plymouth on 7 January.

We are aware that 51 calves died, apparently from disease. Twenty-seven of these deaths occurred at one holding premises where a further 35 calves were found to be unfit for transport and were humanely slaughtered on the premises.

DEFENCE

Housing, Aldershot

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what opportunities there are for local housing associations to purchase houses or flats no longer needed by his Ministry in Aldershot.

Mr. Soames: My Department has no plans to sell any houses or flats in Aldershot in the foreseeable future.

Military Equipment

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military needs it was decided that truck-mounted concrete mixers were required, as set out in future purchase No. EM and D1A/150; what consideration has been given to leasing the equipment; what information he has as to the availability of such equipment on the civil market; why there has been a delay in the issue of tenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The two truck-mounted concrete mixers in future purchase No. EM and D1A/150 are for use for construction by the Army on operational deployment. Vehicles that meet the military specification for this requirement are not currently available for leasing or immediate purchase on the civil market. Issue of the tender has been delayed pending finalisation of the specification.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military needs 39 commercially proven

ultra-light dumpers are required as set out in future purchase No. EM and D1A/154; what consideration has been given to leasing the equipment; what information he has as to the availability of such equipment on the civil market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The 39 ultra-light dumpers announced in future purchase No. EM and D1A/154 will be used for military engineering construction and training. This purchase represents a proportion of the overall Army requirement. Leasing was considered but ruled out because of cost and the extensive use of these machines on overseas deployment. The balance of the Army's requirement will be met from short-term hire on an as-required basis.

Rescue Co-ordination Centre

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on when the consultation document on the Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland and the location of the rescue co-ordination centre will be published;

(2) whether RAF Kinloss is now being considered as a site for the relocation of the rescue co-ordination centre at Pitreavie and alternative to RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Soames: It remains my Department's plan to relocate the Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland to RAF Leuchars, although the future location of the rescue co-ordination centre is under review. I hope to make an announcement shortly. Neither relocation entails any civilian job losses and it is not therefore our intention to issue a formal consultative document. Nevertheless, the trade unions have been, and will continue to be, consulted on our plans.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Royal Navy on the future of the rescue co-ordination centre at Pitreavie.

Mr. Soames: None.

Pitreavie

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the savings that are expected to accrue from the transfer of Flag Officer Scotland Northern and Northern Ireland from Pitreavie to Faslane, with particular reference to the cost of building an extra floor on the command building at Faslane to accommodate FOSNNI, compared to the maintenance of Pitreavie.

Mr. Soames: The savings accruing from the proposed transfer of FOSNNI from Pitreavie to Faslane are broken down in detail in the consultation document. These savings accrue against the option of maintaining FOSNNI's operations at Pitreavie. Since that date, further planning has revealed that the provision of an extra floor on the command building at Faslane, as opposed to the refurbishment of the building originally proposed to accommodate FOSNNI, may offer additional saving despite the slightly higher works costs—some £600,000—involved. This is currently being evaluated and would be proceeded with only on the basis that it improved or preserved the level of savings set out in the consultation document.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to developing Pitreavie as part of the tri-service communication network.

Mr. Soames: For as long as Pitreavie remains operational, the site will be included as one of the many establishments that the tri-service defence fixed telecommunications system will be required to serve. The development of Pitreavie in this respect would not be required. No broader development of Pitreavie for tri-service communications has been considered.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Freeman: No reports have been made, but offers of employment may have been submitted using the Department's usual application form. Since February 1993, 526 business appointment applications have been received.

Homosexuality

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use is made by the service police of *(a)* the British Telecom Intelligence Department or *(b)* the Post Office Investigations Department in investigating allegations of homosexuality among armed forces personnel.

Mr. Soames : None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the service police use a computer database to cross-reference names in investigations into homosexuality in the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: The only purpose of the computer databases maintained by the service police is to record investigations of service personnel suspected of breaching service law.

Records (Police Access)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what access civilian police have to the records of members of the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: Civilian police do not, as a matter of routine, have access to the records of service personnel. They may, however, request and receive information from service records to assist in their investigations.

SAS Trade and Investments

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the involvement of Royal Ordnance in 1985 in plans to sell anti-riot guns to SAS Trade and Investments.

Mr. Freeman: I have no knowledge of any such involvement.

Lesbians

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records were kept by his Department in 1989 regarding possible lesbians in the armed forces.

Mr. Soames: The only such records held by my Department would be those relating to investigations into suspected breaches of service law.

Anti-personnel Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the failure rates of anti-personnel land mines which are intended to self-destruct or self-neutralise; and what is their purchase cost.

Mr. Freeman: No self-destructing or self-neutralising anti-personnel land mines are in service with the armed forces and no MOD tests have been carried out into their failure rates. Details of their purchase cost are not held by my Department.

Security Conferences

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what delegations from Iran or from the Iranian embassy in London have attended conferences or exhibitions involving the display of defence-related security or paramilitary products in the United Kingdom since March 1993.

Mr. Freeman: Since March 1993, the Ministry of Defence has not invited any delegations from Iran or the Iranian embassy in London to attend such conferences or exhibitions.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electricity Generation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will invite the Director General of Offer (Northern Ireland) to carry out a cost-benefit analysis on the next tranche of electricity generation which will take into account the social, economic and environmental effects on Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: No. Following the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland responsibility for future generation planning rests with Northern Ireland Electricity plc. Under the terms of its licence NIE is obliged to purchase its power requirements at the most economic price obtainable having regard to the sources available. This enables NIE to consider other aspects such as fuel diversity and security of supply. In doing so, NIE will have to satisfy the independent Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland.

Maze Prison

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what circumstances hacksaws or similar articles have been made available to some prisoners at Her Majesty's prison at the Maze in the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: Prisoners at Her Majesty's prison Maze, in common with other prisons in Northern Ireland, have access to a range of approved handicraft materials and tools. These are issued on the basis of the risk they would pose to the security of the prison and the safety of staff. Prison officers carry out regular checks to ensure that all tools are accounted for. No hacksaws are issued.

Home Helps and District Nurses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* home helps and *(b)* district nurses per 1,000 people over the age of 65 years there were for each of the years 1989 to 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The information as at 30 June each year is as follows:

Number per 1,000 people aged 65 and over

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Home helps	14.3	12.9	11.3	10.6	9.7
District Nurses	[1]—	2.4	2.2	2.1	1.8

[1] Information prior to 1990 was not collected on a comparable basis.

Disabled Students

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the number of disabled students' awards in each of the last three years; and what has been the cost in each year.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Number of allowances	14	36	75
Cost	16,228	51,532	108,473

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how may of those reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Sir John Wheeler: There have been no reports of offers of employment from home civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office since February 1993.

The civil service management code does not apply to Northern Ireland civil service staff. The equivalent regulation for Northern Ireland civil servants are contained in the Northern Ireland pay and conditions of service code. Under these regulations, two members of staff from the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office have reported an offer of employme from an outside employer since February 1993 and both were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Stormont (Fire)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what parts of the Stormont buildings were maintained, redecorated or refurbished by his Department, over the past five years; and what was the cost to the Exchequer.

Mr. Moss *[holding reply 16 January 1995]:* The cost to the Exchequer of maintaining Parliament buildings over the last five years is as follows:

1990–91 £	1991–92 £	1992–93 £	1993–94 £	1994–95 £
85,073	63,184	71,240	81,092	74,017

The figure for 1994–95 represents expenditure incurred prior to the fire.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Fire Precautions (Places of Work) Regulations 1993 have an equivalent in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss *[Holding reply 16 January 1995]:* I understand that the Fire Precautions (Places of Work) Regulations will come into effect in Great Britain in early 1995. A consultation paper incorporating proposals for equivalent Northern Ireland Regulations is expected to be issued by the end of February 1995.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what fire regulations are imposed on *(a)* the Stormont Parliament building and *(b)* Northern Irish stately homes and heritage buildings which are open to the public.

Mr. Moss *[Holding reply 16 January 1995]:* The inquiry by Sir Reginal Doyle into the fire at Parliament buildings on 2 January 1995 will consider the fire safety legislation which applies to Parliament buildings.

The majority of stately homes in Northern Ireland which are open to the public are in the care of the National Trust, which co-operates with the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland to ensure that the properties comply with the relevant legislation.

Listed buildings which form part of the Government Estate are subject to the Fire Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 as it applies to Crown property. Other listed buildings open to the public are required to have a fire certificate if they belong to a class of building so designated under the 1984 order.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what insurance against fire loss or damage exists in relation to the fabric of the Stormont buildings and the furnishings and artefacts therein.

Mr. Moss *[holding reply 16 January 1995]:* In line with Government policy that Departments do not normally insure commercially, there is no insurance against fire loss or damage in relation to the fabric and furnishings of Parliament buildings.

Some items of silverware, which were not damaged in the recent fire, were insured commercially.

New Zealand Flatworm

Mr. William Ross: To aks the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what studies he has carried out into the numbers of areas in Northern Ireland where the New Zealand flatworm has been found; whether it is increasing in numbers and areas affected; and what has been its impact on native earthworms and soil structure.

Mr. Ancram *[holding reply 17 January 1995]:* The New Zealand flatworm has now been identified at more than 500 sites in Northern Ireland. The majority of these are domestic gardens, but available evidence indicates that it is spreading into agricultural land.

Department of Agriculture scientists are engaged in studies into the impact of the flatworm on earthworms in grasslands in Northern Ireland. These studies have shown that native earthworm numbers are significantly decreased and some earthworm species may be eliminated. Flatworm—induced reductions in earthworm numbers have been linked to adverse changes in soil, bulk density and water-holding capacity, hence soil fertility is likely to be adversely affected.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Shipbuilding

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what comparative assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department as the sponsoring Department for the shipbuilding industry in Tyne and Wear alongside the work of the Scottish Office and Northern Ireland Office.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government's policies on sponsorship of the shipbuilding industry apply equally in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The success of individual companies in the United Kingdom depends upon the management and work force of those companies, and the market conditions they encounter.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the future for the shipbuilding industry in Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Charles Wardle: All sectors of the economy are equally important in maintaining and increasing our national prosperity. The Government make no judgments about the relative prospects of individual sectors.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Heseltine: No central records of offers are kept, but 52 staff have made applications to accept offers of outside employment since February 1993.

VAT (Fuel)

Ms Coffey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the effect of value added tax on gas and electricity levels of consumption by *(a)* low users and *(b)* high users.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy's reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) of 22 March 1993, *Official Report,* column *484-85* stated that the imposition of VAT on 17.5 per cent. on gas and electricity was expected to reduce domestic sector energy consumption by about 4 per cent. below what it would otherwise have been. This estimate took no account of any offsetting measures. There is no specific estimate available for the effect of 8 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel, but it may be assumed that the effect would be roughly half that given for the 17.5 per cent. rate. No separate estimates of the effects on low and high users are available.

Executive Search Agencies

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what use his Department has made of executive search agencies in filling vacancies within his Department and executive agencies administered by his Department during the last year; and how much these services have cost his Department.

Mr. Ian Taylor: During the past year the Department of Trade and Industry filled one post, the chief executive of the Invest in Britain Bureau, using the services of an executive search agency. The total cost, including advertising, was £23,850.

Chief executives of agencies will reply direct, where appropriate, in respect of their own use of executive search agencies.

Letter from R. D. Worswick to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 20 December 1994:

I have been asked to answer with respect to the Laboratory of the Government Chemist your question to the President of the Board of Trade tabled on 12 December 1994.

The Laboratory of the Government Chemist has not used the services of an executive search agency during the last year.

Letter from John Hobday to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

Further to Mr Taylor's reply to your question of 12 December about the use made by the Department of Trade and Industry of Executive Search Agencies, the position in respect of the Accounts Services Agency is that it has made no use of such Agencies during the last year.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

USE OF EXECUTIVE SEARCH AGENCIES

Further to Mr. Taylor's reply to your Parliamentary Question on this subject, I can add that this Agency has not had any occasion to use the services of an executive search agency during the past year.

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

DTI USE OF SEARCH AGENCIES

During the past year the Radiocommunication Agency has not used the services of an executive search agency in order to fill vacancies.

Letter from W. Edgar to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

I would refer to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade concerning the use of executive search agencies in filling vacancies within the Department of Trade and Industry and its Executive Agencies. I would confirm that NEL has not, during the last year, used an executive search agency to fill any vacancy which has arisen at NEL.

Letter from David Durham to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

You recently tabled the following Parliamentary Question:

To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what use his Department has made of executive search agencies in filling vacancies within his Department and executive agencies administered by his Department during the last year; and how much these services have cost his Department.

I am replying as Chief Executive and Registrar of Companies House.

During the past year, Companies House have had no occasion to make use of Executive Search Agencies in filling vacancies.

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

I am responding on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question about use of executive search agencies in filling vacancies. The Patent Office advises executive search agencies of vacancies where in our experience it is hard to find suitable applicants, such as computer specialists. However, no staff were recruited by this means in the past year and no fees were paid.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the use and cost of executive search agencies by The Insolvency Service.

The Insolvency Service has not made any use of executive search agencies during the past year. It has used employment agencies for the recruitment of casual administration grades and for short term appointees with professional qualifications and experience on a non-permanent basis.

Letter from Dr. Peter Clapham to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 18 January 1995:

You asked the President of the Board of Trade about the use of executive search agencies within DTI and its Executive Agencies.

In the case of the National Physical Laboratory, I can tell that no use of such agencies has been made during the last year.

British Gas

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the case of Rose McKeown and British Gas.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This is a matter for British Gas.

Professional Football

Ms Hoey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of the current accountancy procedures relating to the fees and payments of the transfer of professional footballers;

(2) what assessment he has made of the accountancy procedures of the valuation of the professional footballers as assets of the football clubs.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. Football clubs that are limited companies must follow the provisions of the Companies Act 1985, accounting standards and generally accepted accounting practice. Complaints about departures from the accounting requirements of the Companies Act by public and large private companies are dealt with by the financial reporting review panel; my Department deals with other such complaints.

Wool Content Labelling

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department is taking to ensure that the wool content declarations for imported garments and carpets are correct.

Mr. Ian Taylor: EC Directive 71/307/EEC, as amended, requires textile products which are placed on the market to bear or be accompanied by an accurate indication of their fibre content. The directive is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Textile Products (Indications of Fibre Content) Regulations 1986, as amended by the Textile Products (Indications of Fibre Content) (Amendment) Regulations of 1988 and 1994, which are enforced by local authority trading standards departments. The European Commission pursues complaints about the manner in which member states have implemented and enforced the requirements of the directive. Following representations by my Department, I am informed that the Commission has instituted infraction proceedings against Italy for incorrect implementation of the directive.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next plans to meet chief trading standards officers to discuss imports of wool content garments and carpets.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have no such plans. The Department's actions in this area are set out in my reply of today to the hon. Member.

Export Credits Guarantee Cover (Russia)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the nature of export credits guarantee cover currently available for Russia; how much of that cover has been taken up by British companies; what the criteria for cover are; what sort of commercial ventures this cover is intended to stimulate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: ECGD has made US$800 million of medium to long-term export credit and investment insurance cover available for United Kingdom business in the Russian Federation. Approximately US$180 million of this ECGD cover has been utilised and two further projects, currently in negotiation, are expected to use up about another US$420 million. It has been agreed with the Russian authorities that the ECGD cover should be used to support projects which will earn hard currency earning or save foreign exchange, by means of import substitution or are in certain priority sectors: energy, minerals, food processing or distribution, health care or medical equipment. It is intended that the cover should be used primarily to support self-financing projects which, after completion, should earn much-needed foreign exchange revenues for Russia.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much funding his Department will be providing to TECs in 1995–96 for small and medium businesses.

Mr. Ian Taylor: For 1995–96, my Department is providing TECs with £32.7 million to part fund a range of business—support measures aimed mainly at small and medium-sized businesses. A further £8.8 million is being provided to TECs for the diagnostic and consultancy service delivered by Business Link. My Department is also providing funding totalling £42.9 million for providing a range of advisory services in Business Links and for helping to complete the Business Link network which will mainly assist small and medium-sized businesses.

The total funding for 1995–96 is £84.4 million, as compared to £57.4 million for 1994–95. This substantial increase reflects the high priority which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade attaches to the speedy development of the Business Link network and to the enhancement of the level and quality of business support services.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the price of electricity has increased or decreased in real terms since privatisation in each of the regional electricity companies.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The percentage changes in real terms in the price of electricity for domestic consumers between 1989 and 1994 in each of the regional electricity companies are shown in the following table.

Regional electricity company	*Percentage change between 1989 and 1994 on average household bill (excluding VAT)*[1,2] *Standard tariff*	*Economy 7 tariff*
East Midlands Electricity	–2.3	–1.4
Eastern Electricity	–4.4	–4.8
London Electricity	–6.8	–3.3
Manweb	–5.4	–3.5
Midlands Electricity	–9.7	–4.7
Northern Electricity	+0.7	–0.7
Norweb	–7.1	–5.9
Seeboard	–6.9	–5.8
South Wales Electricity	+2.0	+1.5
South Western Electricity	–1.0	+0.2
Southern Electricity	–3.1	–1.9
Yorkshire Electricity	–9.3	–5.5

[1] Based on the assumption that the average household consumes 3,300 kWh of electricity per year on the Standard tariff and 6,600 kWh (3,000 day units and 3,600 night units) on the Economy 7 tariff. Standing charges are included as are any lump sum rebates made in 1994. No account has been taken of discounts given by the regional electricity companies for direct debit or similar methods of payment.

[2] Real terms prices are calculated using the GDP (market prices) deflator.

VAT has been excluded from the above figures. This tax, at 8 per cent. was imposed from 1 April 1994, but an unspecified number of consumers paid in advance and will not have paid any VAT during 1994.

The average price of electricity to industrial consumers in the United Kingdom decreased, in real terms, by 12.4 per cent. between 1989 and 1994. Details of prices charged to industry by individual companies are commercially confidential.

Iraq (Arms Sales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the Ministers in his Department who have had responsibilities in respect of the sale of arms to Iraq.

Mr. Heseltine: As President of the Board of Trade, I have responsibility for export licensing, to Iraq or anywhere else. This responsibility has been exercised by Governments prior to this Administration.

Since May 1979, the Presidents of the Board of Trade and Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry have been:

Right hon. Sir John Nott
Right hon. John Biffen MP
Right hon. Lord Cockfield
Right hon. Lord Parkinson
Right hon. Lord Tebbit
Right hon. Sir Leon Brittan
Right hon. Paul Channon MP
Right hon. Lord Young
Right hon. Lord Ridley
Right hon. Peter Lilley MP
Right hon. Michael Heseltine MP

Since May 1979 the Ministers for Trade have been:

Right hon. Lord Parkinson
Right hon. Lord Rees
Right hon. Paul Channon MP

Right hon. Alan Clark
Right hon. Lord Trefgarne
Right hon. Sir Timothy Sainsbury MP
Right hon. Richard Needham MP

The following Ministers have also held certain responsibilities for trade matters:

Right hon. Kenneth Clarke MP
Right hon. Tony Newton MP
Edward Leigh MP
Ian Taylor MP

It is not practical to determine which of these Ministers may have considered export licences for arms to Iraq.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. Worthington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which types of anti-personnel mine are manufactured in Britain and are allowed to be exported.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Anti-personnel mines have not been produced in Britain, or exported, for over a decade. On 27 July 1994, the Government announced an indefinite moratorium on the export of mines that do not self-destruct or self-neutralise. In considering any application for an export licence for self-destructing or self-neutralising anti-personnel mines, my Department, together with our advisers in other Government Departments, would consider very carefully the political and military implications of allowing consignments to go overseas. Adherence by the proposed recipient country to the principles of protocol II of the UN weaponry convention, which places certain prohibitions and restrictions on the use of land mines, would be a significant factor in such considerations.

Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what external financing limit has been set for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority for 1995–96.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The UKAEA's external financing limit for 1995–96 will be minus £10.3 million.

Post Office

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the Royal Mail spent on its campaign promoting greater commercial freedom for the Post Office; and how this money was spent.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* This is an operational matter for the Post Office.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To aks the President of the Board of Trade how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* I am currently responsible for a total of more than 630 public appointments. The public appointment unit provides names of suitably qualified candidates for a wide range of DTI public appointments. In 1994, nine appointments to six separate public bodies were made from names supplied by the PAU.

British Gas

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the consequences of Her Majesty's Government's policy of disaggregating the operations of British Gas on the current routine inspection, servicing and supply of spare parts for domestic gas appliances and any implications for the safety of their operations.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* We expect British Gas to continue to provide an emergency service to respond to suspected gas leaks. This will include the free half hour's work to fix the leak, and deal with any related minor repairs to appliances.

The Government are determined that safety standards will be maintained in the proposed extension of competition to the domestic gas market. The Health and Safety Commission has been asked to report on this issue.

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Unemployment

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide estimates of the number of 16 and 17–year–olds not currently in full–time education, work or training in Lewisham.

Mr. Paice: Estimates for Lewisham are unavailable, but the labour force survey shows that in summer 1994 there were 17,000 16 and 17–year–olds who were not in full or part–time employment, training or full–time education in the Greater London region. Of these, 10,000 were actively seeking employment or training. The remainder were economically inactive and include, for example, those young people who were looking after the home or who were long–term sick or disabled. The Government guarantee that all 16 and 17–year–olds who are not in full–time education or a job and are seeking training are offered a suitable youth training place.

Disability Symbol

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many organisations have applied to use the disability symbol and been refused;

(2) how many complaints have been received regarding employers using the disability symbol and not implementing the five commitments to action;

(3) how many organisations have used the disability symbol in the past but have had the facility removed for not carrying out the five commitments to action;

(4) how many organisations now use the disability symbol.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. John Heppell, dated 18 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about organisations who use, or have used, the disability symbol.

You asked how many organisations have applied to use the disability symbol and have been refused. While there are occasions when the Employment Service (ES) recommends that an organisation delay in adopting the symbol until they have taken

some further action, we do not maintain records of such instances. I am aware of no circumstance where we have refused an employer authority to adopt the symbol.

You also asked how many complaints have been received about symbol users not implementing one of their commitments, and how many had been asked to withdraw from symbol use due to non-fulfilment of their commitments.

We do not keep a central record of complaints, although I am aware of two that have reached my head office direct. Any complaints of this nature are taken very seriously and investigated with the symbol user concerned by a representative from the Placing, Assessment and Counselling Team or the Major Organisations' Development Unit. In cases where the symbol was clearly being abused we would ask the organisation to stop using it, although I am not aware of any instance to date where this has happened.

The last published statistics in July 1994 record 940 employers using the symbol, including a number of organisations operating throughout the country.

I hope this is helpful.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the turnover rates of each TEC board for each year since their creation.

Mr. Paice: I am unable to give the information that the hon. Member is asking for, as it is not collected in that form. However, the total annual turnover for board members for training and enterprise councils in England and Wales is shown in the table:

Date	*Annual turnover per cent.*
January 92 to December 92	14.9
January 93 to December 93	14.6
January 94 to December 94	25.7

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the surpluses in the accounts of every TEC for every year since their creation *(a)* as a percentage of that TEC's total expenditure and *(b)* in money terms.

Mr. Paice: Lists of English training and enterprise councils with the information requested on "in year" operating surpluses, obtained from their annual statutory audited accounts, at the end of the financial years 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 are shown in the tables.

I am unable to give the figures requested for 1993–94, as this information is not yet in the public domain for every TEC. However, as TEC accounts for 1993–94 become available to the Department, copies are placed in the Library.

TECs by region 1990–91

	Post tax surplus £	*Total percentage of expenditure*
NORTHERN		
County Durham	1,168,483	9.08
Northumberland	1,199,961	19.84
Teesside	1,956,000	7.12
Tyneside	2,548,930	8.09
Sunderland (Wearside)	1,707,787	10.17
	8,581,161	9.06

TECs by region 1990–91

	Post tax surplus £	*Total percentage of expenditure*
NORTH WEST		
CEWTEC	Started April 1991	—
Cumbria	1,682,149	13.19
ELTEC	1,751,853	15.93
LAWTEC	Started April 1991	—
Merseyside	Started June 1991	—
NORMID	Started April 1991	—
QUALITEC	Started April 1991	—
	3,434,002	14.46
GREATER MANCHESTER		
Bolton/Bury	292,200	6.49
Manchester	1,321,382	14.00
METRO	222,585	3.79
Oldham	805,748	13.37
Rochdale	88,448	1.61
South and East Cheshire	877,438	11.60
Stockport and High Peak	292,697	6.14
	3,900,498	8.93
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE		
Barnsley/Doncaster	Started January 1991	—
Bradford	133,539	3.75
Calderdale and Kirklees	364,269	2.20
Humberside	Started April 1991	—
Leeds	1,211,214	16.94
North Yorks	1,313,000	16.79
Rotherham	485,255	7.75
Sheffield	934,106	10.29
Wakefield	323,352	17.36
	4,764,735	9.12
EASTERN		
Bedfordshire	Started April 1991	—
Cambridgeshire	27,124	3.80
Essex	1,256,762	12.37
Greater Peterborough	116,772	14.89
Hertfordshire	578,706	5,39
Norfolk and Waverney	1,292,717	21.21
Suffolk	1,277,059	42.00
	4,549,140	14.43
EAST MIDLANDS		
Greater Nottingham	Started April 1991	—
Leicester	Started April 1991	—
Lincolnshire	Started April 1991	—
Northamptonshire	Started April 1991	—
North Derbyshire	Started April 1991	—
North Nottinghamshire	122,137	1.31
South Derbyshire	(16,090)	(0.58)
	106,047	0.88
WEST MIDLANDS		
Birmingham	600,534	4.98
Central England	Started April 1991	—
Coventry/Warwick	2,185,542	22.25
Dudley	Started April 1991	—
HAWTEC	Started April 1991	—
Sandwell	Started April 1991	—
Shropshire	Started April 1991	—

TECs by region 1990–91

	Post tax surplus £	Total percentage of expenditure
Staffordshire	2,671,771	21.24
Walsall	409,681	13.36
Wolverhampton	Started April 1991	—
	5,867,528	15.64
SOUTH WEST		
Avon	Started April 1991	—
Devon/Cornwall	1,701,876	4.75
Dorset	1,597,625	19.26
Gloucester	Started January 1991	—
Somerset	646,783	10.00
Wiltshire	Started April 1991	—
	3,946,284	7.80
LONDON		
AZTEC	230,464	12.47
CENTEC	Started September 1991	—
CILNTEC	Started October 1991	—
LETEC	Started November 1990	—
North London	Started January 1991	—
North West London	Started November 1990	—
SOLOTEC	Started April 1991	—
South Thames	Started April 1991	—
West London	Started August 1991	—
	230,464	12.47
SOUTH EAST		
Hampshire	1,363,924	11.03
Isle of Wight	239,236	22.29
Kent	Started November 1990	—
Milton Keynes/North Buckinghamshire	335,225	13.00
Heart of England	600,664	16.30
Surrey	Started April 1991	—
Sussex	Started April 1991	—
Thames Valley Ent.	Started April 1991	—
	2,539,049	12.89
Grand Total	37,918,908	10.31

TECs by region 1991–1992

	Post tax surplus £	Total percentage of expenditure
NORTHERN		
County Durham	2,818,075	9.47
Northumberland	1,262,703	8.90
Teeside	3,838,000	13.91
Tyneside	2,818,000	7.03
Sunderland (Wearside)	293,924	1.44
	11,030,702	8.36
NORTH WEST		
CEWTEC	1,974,732	10.49
Cumbria	1,187,739	7.22
ELTEC	370,271	2.02
LAWTEC	3,150,027	12.81
Merseyside	3,012,181	8.16
NORMID	1,511,822	16.77
QUALITEC	741,670	8.47
	11,948,442	9.00
GREATER MANCHESTER		
Bolton/Bury	1,720,642	14.67
Manchester	2,936,887	8.56

TECs by region 1991–1992

	Post tax surplus £	Total percentage of expenditure
METRO	188,000	1.84
Oldham	570,321	6.94
Rochdale	399,262	6.03
South and East Cheshire	1,124,823	11.01
Stockport and High Peak	1,833,580	23.94
	8,773,515	9.86
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE		
Barnsley/Doncaster	2,688,055	11.73
Bradford	1,773,485	10.92
Calderdale and Kirklees	465,421	2.29
Humberside	2,952,198	8.43
Leeds	2,352,648	13.14
North Yorkshire	2,104,000	14.08
Rotherham	1,485,797	14.25
Sheffield	2,340,235	10.53
Wakefield	2,118,035	20.68
	18,279,874	10.74
EASTERN		
Bedfordshire	1,335,932	13.03
Cambridgeshire	560,998	10.08
Essex	3,037,484	12.50
Great Peterborough	754,539	10.79
Hertfordshire	863,034	5.26
Norfolk and Waverney	1,279,837	6.36
Suffolk	1,234,110	9.80
	9,065,934	9.42
EAST MIDLANDS		
Greater Nottingham	844,000	4.55
Leicester	2,709,000	13.18
Lincolnshire	1,225,370	6.74
Northampton	1,867,401	18.83
North Derbyshire	653,113	6.48
North Nottinghamshire	1,494,000	9.98
South Derbyshire	3,510,586	25.89
	12,303,470	11.63
WEST MIDLANDS		
Birmingham	2,217,000	5.74
Central England	992,591	11.52
Coventry/Warwick	9,899	0.04
Dudley	411,480	4.06
HAWTEC	978,862	10.13
Sandwell	917,391	9.28
Shropshire	598,942	4.92
Staffordshire	1,399,654	4.88
Walsall	988,580	14.04
Wolverhampton	1,032,122	10.47
	9,546,521	6.01
SOUTH WEST		
Avon	1,925,855	8.10
Devon/Cornwall	3,187,000	6.47
Dorset	1,171,204	9.08
Gloucester	1,574,830	11.19
Somerset	388,152	2.99
Wiltshire	849,313	7.97
	9,096,354	7.35

TECs by region 1991–1992

	Post tax surplus £	*Total percentage of expenditure*
LONDON		
AZTEC	1,289,656	15.00
CENTEC	148,575	1.30
CILNTEC	550,812	8.12
LETEC	(483,267)	(1.72)
North London	1,153,445	13.01
North West London	438,984	8.04
SOLOTEC	896,400	5.99
South Thames	1,292,463	7.22
West London	162,104	1.89
	5,449,172	4.92
SOUTH EAST		
Hampshire	1,884,488	6.68
Isle of Wight	479,142	14.84
Kent	3,542,667	10.15
Milton Keynes/North Buckinghamshire	360,889	5.46
Heart of England	962,649	10.48
Surrey	693,092	5.97
Sussex	3,253,000	15.45
Thames Valley Ent.	2,719,118	14.57
	13,895,045	10.41
Grand Total	109,389,029	8.73

TECs by region 1992–93

	Post tax surplus £	*Total percentage of expenditure*
NORTHERN		
County Durham	2,595,107	10.07
Northumberland	1,233,752	8.58
Teesside	3,388,000	12.00
Tyneside	(883,000)	(2.13)
Sunderland (Wearside)	512,381	2.72
	6,846,240	5.32
NORTH WEST		
CEWTEC	603,311	3.12
Cumbria	110,772	0.67
ELTEC	1,338,587	7.32
LAWTEC	(236,657)	(0.83)
Merseyside	1,191,532	2.59
NORMID	(418,902)	(3.08)
QUALITEC	312,509	3.70
	2,901,152	1.92
GREATER MANCHESTER		
Bolton/Bury	847,848	6.64
Manchester	(880,942)	(2.42)
METRO	108,000	1.03
Oldham	83,406	1.01
Rochdale	597,651	6.98
South and East Cheshire	420,244	3.21
Stockport and High Peak	655,247	6.93
	1,831,454	1.85
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE		
Barnsley/Doncaster	1,012,208	4.15
Bradford	1,524,888	8.73

TECs by region 1992–93

	Post tax surplus £	*Total percentage of expenditure*
Calderdale and Kirklees	(1,574)	(0.01)
Humberside	2,258,408	6.84
Leeds	2,160,436	12.01
North Yorkshire	936,000	5.87
Rotherham	1,134,336	9.85
Sheffield	883,000	4.19
Wakefield	668,301	6.08
	10,576,003	6.08
EASTERN		
Bedfordshire	220,801	1.88
Cambridgeshire	34,280	0.55
Essex	742,805	2.45
Greater Peterborough	661,071	8.67
Hertfordshire	1,199,133	5.70
Norfolk and Waverney	(411,789)	(1.94)
Suffolk	473,259	3.28
	2,919,560	2.59
EAST MIDLANDS		
Greater Nottingham	98,000	0.48
Leicester	1,888,317	8.35
Lincolnshire	1,328,872	6.46
Northamptonshire	109,609	0.82
North Derbyshire	87,828	0.91
North Nottinghamshire	(376,000)	(2.14)
South Derbyshire	611,343	3.77
	3,747,969	3.11
WEST MIDLANDS		
Birmingham	(1,606,000)	(4.12)
Central England	347,027	3.47
Coventry/Warwick	7,122	0.03
Dudley	801,744	7.50
HAWTEC	702,859	6.14
Sandwell	788,829	7.07
Shropshire	703,807	5.40
Staffordshire	1,717,636	5.47
Walsall	941,491	10.99
Wolverhampton	379,147	3.37
	4,783,662	2.78
SOUTH WEST		
Avon	1,647,961	6.03
Devon/Cornwall	121,000	0.25
Dorset	53,973	0.34
Gloucester	666	0.00
Somerset	711,143	5.70
Wiltshire	251,265	1.98
	2,786,008	2.14
LONDON		
AZTEC	411,486	3.73
CENTEC	757,876	3.54
CILNTEC	1,610,046	7.94
LETEC	1,138,517	3.51
North London	1,851,198	10.82
North West London	424,679	4.30
SOLOTEC	2,530,966	14.37
South Thames	2,318,842	7.55
West London	1,000.929	6.35
	12,044,539	6.84

TECs by region 1992–93

	Post tax surplus £	*Total percentage of expenditure*
SOUTH EAST		
Hampshire	1,430,483	4.67
Isle of Wight	161,087	3.95
Kent	2,231,284	7.31
Milton Keynes/North Buckinghamshire	99,326	1.21
Heart of England	860,611	7.88
Surrey	967,259	8.03
Sussex	1,875,000	8.23
Thames Valley Ent.	643,002	2.95
	8,268,052	5.87
Grand Total	56,704,639	4.04

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the administrative costs for each TEC for every year since their creation.

Mr. Paice: A list of English training and enterprise councils and their "in year" administrative costs, as shown in their annual statutory audited accounts, at the end of the financial years 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 are shown in the tables.

I am unable to give the figures requested for 1993–94 as this information is not yet in the public domain for every TEC. However, as TEC accounts for 1993–94 become available to the Department, copies are placed in the Library.

Administration Costs

TECs by region	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £
NORTHERN			
County Durham	1,291,920	1,930,205	2,109,458
Northumberland	1,230,408	1,631,608	2,350,938
Teesside	1,696,000	2,975,000	3,837,000
Tyneside	2,533,590	3,241,000	3,475,000
Sunderland (Wearside)	974,086	1,376,968	2,094,139
	7,726,004	11,154,781	13,866,535
NORTH WEST			
CEWTEC	Started April 91	1,258,007	1,484,953
Cumbria	1,301,023	1,477,556	1,653,511
ELTEC	736,697	1,393,572	1,390,484
LAWTEC	Started April 91	1,535,907	2,018,045
Merseyside	Started June 91	2,334,212	4,622,631
NORMID	Started June 91	1,067,312	1,604,052
QUALITEC	Started April 91	669,078	920,483
	2,037,720	9,735,644	13,694,159
GREATER MANCHESTER			
Bolton/Bury	554,160	1,278,992	2,009,487
Manchester	871,970	3,168,334	3,989,996
METRO	512,329	1,161,000	1,424,000
Oldham	498,808	734,111	1,112,007
Rochdale	459,879	594,712	765,910
South and East Cheshire	651,096	2,128,048	1,126,094
Stockport and High Peak	446,341	789,504	956,269
	3,994,583	9,854,701	11,383,763

Administration Costs

TECs by region	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £
YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE			
Barnsley/Doncaster	Started January 91	1,590,594	1,820,761
Bradford	267,487	1,453,408	1,106,553
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,057,394	1,730,039	2,041,575
Humberside	Started April 91	2,814,334	3,119,039
Leeds	735,776	1,730,338	1,999,374
North Yorkshire	945,000	1,370,000	1,675,000
Rotherham	600,955	1,143,527	1,318,793
Sheffield	762,207	2,500,135	2,866,000
Wakefield	120,737	1,027,992	1,179,304
	4,489,556	15,360,367	17,126,399
EASTERN			
Bedfordshire	Started April 91	923,120	1,191,963
CAMBS	31,722	786,073	972,382
Essex	1,193,476	1,961,749	2,567,573
Greater Peterborough	154,684	828,190	1,297,530
Hertfordshire	1,638,449	1,855,181	2,103,148
Norfolk and Waverney	860,049	1,626,594	2,679,051
Suffolk	334,217	1,309,588	1,557,908
	4,212,597	9,290,495	12,369,555
EAST MIDLANDS			
Greater Nottingham	Started April 91	1,679,000	1,842,000
Leicester	Started April 91	2,916,000	2,612,117
Lincolnshire	Started April 91	183,502	564,370
Northamptonshire	Started April 91	1,097,575	1,221,752
North Derbyshire	Started April 91	933,356	1,067,426
North Nottinghamshire	703,865	1,084,000	1,349,000
South Derbyshire	302,641	1,749,634	2,372,992
	1,006,506	9,643,067	11,029,657
WEST MIDLANDS			
Birmingham	926,293	2,639,000	3,058,000
Central England	Started April 91	810,650	1,074,936
Coventry/ Warwick	530,854	1,083,099	1,253,093
Dudley	Started April 91	1,019,678	1,369,523
HAWTEC	Started April 91	997,787	1,287,504
Sandwell	Started April 91	865,159	947,277
Shropshire	Started April 91	991,146	1,113,304
Staffordshire	931,374	2,363,849	2,925,055
Walsall	315,326	830,837	966,586
Wolverhampton	Started April 91	919,339	1,087,057
	2,703,847	12,520,544	15,082,335
SOUTH WEST			
Avon	Started April 91	2,099,463	2,347,261
Devon/Cornwall	2,330,485	4,174,000	4,841,000
Dorset	854,630	1,166,387	1,274,644
Gloucester	Started January 91	1,313,161	1,387,979
Somerset	548,636	1,114,066	1,139,745
Wiltshire	Started April 91	1,002,296	1,237,141
	3,733,751	10,869,373	12,227,770
LONDON			
AZTEC	162,548	1,197,226	1,892,569
CENTEC	Started Sept 91	1,158,024	2,770,562
CILNTEC	Started Oct 91	792,984	2,054,389
LETEC	Started Nov 90	2,966,277	3,787,841

Administration Costs

TECs by region	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £
North London	Started January 91	882,327	1,545,921
North West London	Started Nov 90	635,970	1,229,654
SOLOTEC	Started April 91	1,826,341	2,118,678
South Thames	Started April 91	2,230,347	3,301,964
West London	Started August 91	1,030,390	2,018,400
	162,548	12,719,886	20,719,978
SOUTH EAST			
Hampshire	955,888	1,790,270	2,185,086
Isle of Wight	212,813	369,227	492,737
Kent	Started Nov 90	2,859,350	2,065,046
Milton Keynes/ North Bucks	381,525	939,139	1,002,384
Heart of England	548,372	1,037,979	1,539,912
Surrey	Started April 91	1,159,231	1,816,177
Sussex	Started April 91	1,960,000	2,376,000
Thames Valley Ent.	Started April 91	2,119,515	2,272,152
	2,098,598	12,234,711	13,749,494
Grand Total	32,165,710	113,383,569	141,249,645

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of women appointed to each TEC board for each year since their creation.

Mr. Paice: Information on women appointed to each training and enterprise council board for each year since the TECs' creation is not held centrally. However, records held centrally on the numbers of women currently on TEC boards in England is shown in the table:

TEC	*Number*
AZTEC	3
Avon TEC	3
Barnsley/Doncaster TEC	1
Bedfordshire TEC	2
Birmingham TEC	3
Bolton Bury TEC	1
Bradford and District TEC	2
CENTEC (Central London)	3
CEWTEC (Chester, Ellesmere Port, Wirral)	2
CILNTEC (City and Inner London North)	1
Calderdale/Kirklees TEC	1
CambsTEC (Central and South Cumbridgeshire)	1
Central England TEC	3
County Durham TEC	2
Coventry and Warwickshire TEC	1
Cumbria TEC	1
Devon and Cornwall TEC	2
Dorset TEC	1
Dudley TEC	1
ELTEC (East Lancashire)	3
Essex TEC	3
Gloucestershire TEC	2
Greater Nottingham TEC	2
Greater Peterborough TEC	1
HAWTEC (Hereford and Worcester)	3
Hampshire TEC	2
Heart of England (Oxfordshire) TEC	3
Humberside TEC	2
Kent TEC	2
Leeds TEC	1
Leicestershire TEC	1
Lincolnshire TEC	2
London East TEC	3
Manchester TEC	1
Merseyside TEC	2
NORMIDTEC (North and Mid Cheshire)	1
Norfolk and Waveney TEC	3
North Derbyshire TEC	3
North London TEC	1
North Nottinghamshire TEC	2
North West London TEC	1
North Yorkshire TEC	2
Northamptonshire TEC	2
Northumberland TEC	1
QUALITEC (St. Helens) Ltd	2
Rochdale TEC	3
Rotherham TEC	1
SOLOTEC	2
Sandwell TEC	1
Sheffield TEC	1
Shropshire TEC	2
Somerset TEC	1
South and East Cheshire TEC	3
Southern Derbyshire TEC	3
Stockport/High Peak TEC	2
Suffolk TEC	3
Sunderland City TEC	2
Surrey TEC	2
Sussex TEC	2
Teesside TEC	1
Thames Valley Enterprise	1
Tyneside TEC	2
Wakefield TEC	1
Walsall TEC	2
West London TEC	4
Wight Training and Enterprise	1
Wiltshire TEC	2
Wolverhampton TEC	1
Total	128

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the members of each TEC board and their companies for each year since their creation.

Mr. Paice: It is not possible to provide a list of the members of each training and enterprise council board and their companies for each year since their creation as this information is not held centrally.

Since January 1994 a list of current members of each TEC board and their companies is placed in the Library every quarter.

Career Development Loans

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1098*, what was the total cost of the career development loan advertising campaign.

Mr. Paice: The cost of the 1993–94 career development loan advertising campaign was £1,862,491.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table comparing male, female and total full-time and part-time employees (i) in employment, (ii) unemployed for October 1992 and the latest available date in *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* Llanelli, *(c)* Retford, *(d)* Chesterfield, *(e)* Nottingham, *(f)* Mansfield, *(g)* Sunderland, *(h)* Wakefield and Dewsbury, *(i)* Barnsley, *(j)* Sheffield, *(k)* Stafford, *(l)* Wigan and St.

Helens, *(m)* Stoke, *(n)* Alfreton and Ashfield, *(o)* Merthyr and Rhymney, *(p)* Sunderland, *(q)* South Tyneside, *(r)* Aberdare, *(s)* Morpeth and Ashington, *(t)* Rotherham and Mexborough and *(u)* Worksop travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Oppenheim: The employment information requested is not available for 1992. The latest reliable employment information for these travel to-work areas is for September 1991, from the periodic census of employment. This information and the unemployment statistics requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database available in the Library.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Miss Widdecombe: I regret that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Youth Training

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage of those leaving youth training schemes who progressed to *(a)* full-time work, *(b)* part-time work, *(c)* self-employment, *(d)* further education and training and *(e)* unemployment, in Southampton, Itchen, Southampton and Hampshire in each of the last five years.

Mr. Paice: Information is not available for individual constituencies and local authorities. Information for Hampshire training and enterprise council is available from 1991–92, the first full year of operation. The information is given in the table.

Leavers in Hampshire TEC

Percentage of leavers in each outcome six months after leaving

	Full-time work	*Part-time work*	*Self employment*	*[1]Further education and training*	*Unemployment*
1991–92	47	6	1	14	24
1992–93	49	5	1	14	26
April 1993–February 1994	50	6	2	15	21

Source:
YT national follow-up survey.
Notes:
[1] Includes those on another Government training programme.

SCOTLAND

School Inspections

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school inspections were carried out in 1994; and how many in each category he estimates will be carried out in 1995.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Inspections of primary and secondary schools take place for a range of purposes including inspections leading to published reports on individual schools, those which contribute evidence to a published report on an aspect of education and those designed to obtain information on miscellaneous other matters. Approximately 310 inspections were carried out in primary schools in 1994 and 170 in secondary schools. A similar number is projected in each category for 1995.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the lengthiest period, on current plans, that *(a)* a primary and *(b)* a secondary school will go without an inspector's visit.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Inspections of primary and secondary schools take place for a range of purposes, including inspections leading to published reports on individual schools, those which contribute evidence to a published report on an aspect of education and those designed to obtain information on miscellaneous other matters. The pattern of inspection visits for these purposes means that, on average, six years may elapse between an inspector's visit to a primary school and two years in the case of secondary schools.

General Practitioners

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the value of chapter 10.5 payments to general practitioners in the highlands and islands for each year since its introduction *(a)* in total for the highlands and islands and *(b)* as an average for applicable practices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information about payments made to general medical practitioners in Highland, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles health boards under the chapter 10.5 payments scheme is set out in the table.

	Financial year			
	1990–91	*[4]1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
	£	£	£	£
Payments to GMPs[1]				
Chapter 10.5	202,795	257,436	325,472	326,155
Transitional[2]	129,813	62,704	—	—
Total	332,608	320,140	325,472	326,155
Average payments per GMP [1,3]				
Chapter 10.5	1,865	2,263	2,812	2,830
Transitional[2]	1,194	551	—	—
Total	3,058	2,814	2,812	2,830

[1] GMPs in practices qualifying for chapter 10.5 payments.
[2] Between 1990 and 1992 amounts paid to GMPs under the transitional payments scheme were deducted from any chapter 10.5 payments due. The transitional payments scheme ceased on 31 March 1992 and thereafter chapter 10.5 payments were made in full.
[3] Whole time equivalent of GMP.
[4] Estimate, based upon data for the second half of the financial year.

Students (Sickness)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students at each further education college have had their grants withdrawn because of sickness absence of more than 28 days in the latest year for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Students at further education colleges in Scotland may be eligible for support from either the Student Awards Agency for Scotland or their education authority, depending on the nature of their course.

No student in receipt of support from the awards agency would have his or her grant withdrawn solely on the grounds of a sickness absence of more than 28 days. There is provision for the level of grant to be adjusted, exceptionally, after the student returns to study where there has been a significantly lower maintenance requirement during the period of absence.

Where a student withdraws from his or her course—permanently or temporarily—following a prolonged period of sickness the maintenance grant will be terminated with effect from the date of withdrawal. Details of the reasons for individual withdrawals are not held centrally.

The terms and conditions on which education authorities in Scotland offer assistance to students are entirely at the discretion of the authority concerned.

Further Education Expenditure

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage increase or decrease in real terms, allowing for inflation, for spending on *(a)* universities and *(b)* further and adult education from 1982–83 to 1992–93.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Between 1982–83 and 1992–93 the then eight Scottish universities were funded by the University Grants Committee and, latterly, the Universities Funding Council. During that period total recurrent public expenditure on the eight universities, in the form of UGC and UFC grants for teaching and research and tuition fees in respect of those students on full-time courses who were charged fees at the home rate, increased by 3.5 per cent. in real terms.

The increase in current expenditure on further education in real terms by local authorities over the same period was 4.2 per cent. This includes expenditure on adult education.

Private Housing Developers

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the levels of Scottish Homes' grants to private housing developers in each year since Scottish Homes was established.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is in the table.

Scottish homes' grants to private housing developers

	£ million outturn
1989–90	0.84
1990–91	9.24
1991–92	14.93
1992–93	25.09
1993–94	28.30

Innumeracy and Illiteracy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are currently being taken to assist schools to overcome innumeracy and illiteracy.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Improving pupils' standards of attainment in English language and mathematics is central to the Government's five to 14 programme. The programme sets out attainment targets, which allow such pupils' performance and progress to be assessed and assisted. National tests also provide an important source of evidence of achievement in key skills and processes in reading, writing, and mathematics. Diagnostic materials have been prepared to help teachers tackle pupils with particular difficulties in English and mathematics.

Social Work Inspectorate

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time equivalent staff are involved in the social work inspectorate; what is *(a)* its annual revenue budget and *(b)* its budget for training and staff development; how much has been spent in the past year on away days for staff to hotels; and what were the purposes of such activities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are 18 full-time equivalent professional members of staff in the inspectorate and 17.5 administrative staff. The inspectorate's budget for 1994–95 is £1,134,618, of which £3,525 was allocated to job-related training. Ten members of staff attended a strategy day along with their colleagues in the social work services group. The purpose of the day was to review the issues involved in local government reorganisation and to consider key objectives over the next two years. The cost of the one-day event was £1,240.

Lochranza Castle

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much in public funds has been spent on the renovation and upkeep of Lochranza castle in each of the past 20 years; and what further expenditure is proposed.

Sir Hector Monro: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Historic Scotland under its chief executive, Mr. Graeme Munro. I have asked Mr. Munro to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Graeme Munro to Mr Brian Wilson, dated 18 January 1995:

1. Sir Hector Monro has asked me to reply to your Question 272 of 11 January about the cost of renovation and upkeep of Lochranza Castle on Arran.

2. Lochranza Castle has been in the Secretary of State's guardianship since 1956. Under Section 13 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, guardianship gives the Secretary of State a duty to maintain the Castle and full control and management of it. The maintenance and management are carried

out by Historic Scotland on behalf of the Secretary of State. The Castle is open to the public free of charge.

3. The information which you sought about costs over the past 20 years and our future expenditure plans is:

3.1 Between 1975 and 1985 we carried out routine maintenance at a cost of approximately £2,000 per annum;

3.2 Between 1986 and 1990, we spent £79,000 consolidating the main entrance tower and repairing a collapsed sea wall, as well as carrying out routine maintenance;

3.3 Between 1991 and 1994, we carried out routine maintenance at a cost of about £1,000 per annum;

3.4 Over the next five years, we plan to undertake another phase of consolidation work which we expect will cost about £15,000 to £20,000 per year.

I am sorry that precise annual figures are not immediately available but I hope that this letter provides the information which you need. Please let me know if I can help further.

Transplant Operations

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many heart transplants were carried out in Scotland in the calendar year 1994;

(2) how many patients were referred outside Scotland for consideration of heart, lung or heart-lung transplant in the calendar years 1993 and 1994;

(3) how many patients were operated on outside Scotland for heart, lung or heart-lung transplant in the calendar years 1993 and 1994.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: During the period January–October 1994, 14 heart transplant operations were carried out in Scotland. The figure is provisional and data for November and December are not yet available.

Information about the number of patients either referred or operated on outside Scotland for heart, lung or heart-lung transplant is not held centrally in Scotland. The hospital to which a patient is referred is a matter for individual clinicians.

Forestry

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what timetable he envisages for the implementation of his future policy towards forestry.

Sir Hector Monro: We are currently considering the responses to "Our Forests—The Way Ahead", which set out our conclusions following the forestry review, and will make an announcement in due course.

Civil Servant Travel

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which airlines have been granted preferred carrier status for civil servant travel to overseas destinations.

Mr. Lang: The preferred carrier for any particular civil servant's travel will depend on the circumstances of the journey concerned and value for money. For regular requirements, my Department has entered into arrangements with Sabena for travel to Brussels and Air France for Paris.

Right to Buy

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total value of discounts to public sector tenants in Scotland exercising their right to buy in each year since 1980–81, both in cash terms and expressed in 1994–95 prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table for each full year for which data are available.

£ million

Year	*Value of discounts (cash)*	*Value of discounts (at 1994–95 prices)*
1980–81	37.647	79.814
1981–82	73.290	141.675
1982–83	104.473	188.526
1983–84	130.756	225.495
1984–85	137.929	226.485
1985–86	130.145	202.475
1986–87	139.921	211.489
1987–88	257.497	369.521
1988–89	425.120	571.674
1989–90	513.940	646.189
1990–91	420.089	488.777
1991–92	371.803	406.947
1992–93	376.111	396.520
1993–94	355.854	362.972

Scottish Enterprise Loans

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what were the locations of the head offices of the firms which benefited from Scottish Enterprise loans and grants in 1993–94;

(2) which companies have benefited from Scottish Enterprise loans and grants in 1993–94; and what were the amounts.

Mr. Stewart: These are operational matters for Scottish Enterprise. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Agricultural Arbitrators

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of Scottish agricultural arbitrators, indicating in each case the individual's stated profession.

Sir Hector Monro: Arbitrations conducted by arbiters appointed by the parties themselves are not notified to my Department. Arbiters appointed by the Secretary of State, following an application by either party, are selected from a panel whose membership was last reviewed in October 1993. I am arranging for copies of the full list of current panel members, with each member's stated profession, to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the guidelines issued to agricultural arbitrators in respect of *(a)* their basis of selection of comparable farms and *(b)* the number of comparable farms to be selected for the purposes of an arbitration; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Provisions for arbitration on the level of rent, including reference to comparable subjects, are contained in section 13 of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 1991. The Act does not, however, specify how the comparables should be selected nor the number. Given the great variation in size and circumstances of farms, comparables are selected by the arbiter in the context of each particular case.

My Department does not issue guidance to arbiters beyond that contained in the relevant legislation. However, training by the Scottish Association of Agricultural Arbiters and the Royal Institution of

Chartered Surveyors in Scotland is available to all arbiters.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has carried out of the costs to tenant farmers associated with agricultural arbitration cases; what fresh proposals he has to bring forward to the makings of the scheme as laid down under the 1991 Act with particular reference to the introduction of a right of appeal to his choice of arbitrator in any given case; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The rate of remuneration for arbiters appointed by the Secretary of State is set by him in accordance with Section 63 of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 1991. It is a matter for the parties themselves to decide how they wish to be represented at the arbitration and the arrangements for awarding expenses set out in schedule 7 to the 1991 Act provide for the arbiter to disallow expenses incurred by the parties unnecessarily.

There are no proposals to introduce changes to the provisions of the 1991 Act to provide parties with a right of appeal against the choice of arbiter by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm arbitrations were held in Scotland in the last five years, indicating the number of arbitrations carried out by each arbitrator; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Members of the Secretary of State's panel of agricultural arbiters were appointed to conduct 255 arbitrations in the years 1990–1994. The information on the number of occasions on which each member of the panel was appointed is set out in the table. A number of these cases were, however, settled by agreement without proceeding to an arbitration hearing.

Member of panel	*Appointments 1990-1994*
R. Baird	11
F. Barraclough	19
J. Boyne	3
A. Bremner	8
D. Buchan	10
C. Campbell	8
I. Chalmers	6
G. Chalmers	6
A. Clark	2
D. Craib	1
T. Cruikshank	1
T. Donald	10
I. Douglas	10
G. Dunlop	1
J. Elliot	1
A. Elvy	2
T. Finlayson	1
R. Forrest	3
W. Fraser	4
W. Gourlay	10
N. Graham-Campbell	3
T. Graham	8
A. Gray	3
P. Hardie	2
I. Harley	1
J. Hunter	2
W. Ironside	1
J. Jones-Perrott	1
D. Laird	1
J. Lamont	1
R. Lennox	1
G. Lumsden	5
J. Lumsden	5
A. MacDonald	1
I. K. MacKenzie	13
K.F.S. MacKenzie	16
R.A.M. MacKenzie	1
J. McLaren	2
I. McLaren	1
J. McNaughton	1
J. Marshall	1
J. Maxwell	1
M. Milligan	19
C. Mitchell	1
J. Pattullo	5
D. Reid	5
T. Renwick	1
G. Robertson	1
J. Seed	5
J. Sharp	4
R. Shearlaw	4
J. Smith	1
G. Tait	2
J. Thorburn	10
P. Waddell	2
R. Walker	1
R. Weir	1
I. Wilson	4
R. Wilson	1

Set-aside Payments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of farmers in Scotland who have not yet received payments under the 1994 arable aid scheme for land set aside from oilseed production for non-food use; how much money in total is currently being withheld; what is the reason for the delay in making such payments; and when he expects the money to be released.

Sir Hector Monro: Seventy-nine payments involving a non-food crop element under the 1994 arable area payments scheme, amounting to a total of just over £2.3 million, are being withheld. My Department has no authority under the relevant EC legislation to make these payments until the collectors-first processors concerned have sent the Intervention Board the necessary documentation covering proof of delivery and the board has given formal clearance for payment to proceed.

My Department will make these outstanding payments as soon as the Intervention Board can give the necessary clearance.

Electro-shock Weapons

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information his Department has in respect of *(a)* past and *(b)* present production of electro-shock weapons at ICL Technical Plastics in Glasgow; what approval his Department has given for such production; and what support he has given (i) directly and (ii) indirectly for the export of such goods.

Mr. Stewart: The Scottish Office does not have, and never has had, any information about the production of electro-shock weapons at ICL Plastics Ltd. nor has the Department ever given, or been asked to give, approval for such production.

Scottish Trade International, the export arm of the Scottish Office and Scottish Enterprise, had some discussions in 1993 with the company about the marketing of a range of conventional riot gear which had been already sold to police forces within the United Kingdom. No mention of electro-shock weapons or similar products has ever been made to officials. The company has not had any direct or indirect financial support from STI.

Sheriff Courts

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was *(a)* the number of cases disposed of and *(b)* the number of custodial sentences imposed, by each sheriff court in Scotland, for each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The available information is set out in the table.

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1989

Sheriff court	*Persons called to court*	*Persons with charge proved*	*Persons receiving a custodial sentence*
Aberdeen	4,989	4,490	556
Banff	481	466	27
Peterhead	849	807	92
Stonehaven	875	806	19
Elgin	1,383	1,301	112
Wick	545	517	39
Inverness	2,177	1,990	205
Fort William	650	604	31
Portree	278	250	13
Dingwall	701	647	70
Tain	503	469	19
Dornoch	225	209	4
Kirkwall	589	554	7
Lerwick	505	493	16
Lochmaddy	178	165	7
Stornoway	398	362	16
Arbroath	1,228	1,128	72
Forfar	995	901	52
Dundee	4,002	3,393	511
Perth	3,137	2,790	248
Alloa	875	756	75
Falkirk	2,544	2,230	211
Stirling	3,078	2,711	231
Cupar	970	880	78
Dunfermline	3,200	2,828	268
Kirkcaldy	3,876	3,511	384
Haddington	1,431	1,282	133
Edinburgh	10,766	9,232	928
Linlithgow	2,567	2,347	247
Duns	179	170	10
Selkirk	343	315	25
Jedburgh	461	435	45
Peebles	289	276	10
Glasgow	11,668	9,763	2,057
Campbeltown	446	422	35
Dunoon	542	491	49
Oban	611	546	33
Rothesay	195	185	28
Dumbarton	3,287	2,836	269
Greenock	2,169	1,976	542
Kilmarnock	5,106	4,524	838
Paisley	5,361	4,455	495
Dumfries	3,862	3,439	174
Kirkcudbright	688	615	58
Stranraer	1,035	939	84
Airdrie	2,678	2,321	444

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1989

Sheriff court	*Persons called to court*	*Persons with charge proved*	*Persons receiving a custodial sentence*
Ayr	4,045	3,583	356
Hamilton	5,215	4,318	642
Lanark	1,026	893	57
Not known	83	20	7
Total	103,284	90,641	10,929

Source:
Unpublished Scottish Office statistics on criminal proceedings.

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1990

Sheriff court	*Persons called to court*	*Persons with charge proved*	*Persons receiving a custodial sentence*
Aberdeen	5,739	5,116	547
Banff	482	464	36
Peterhead	924	882	65
Stonehaven	851	761	19
Elgin	1,304	1,212	93
Wick	673	608	55
Inverness	2,386	2,192	228
Fort William	631	569	48
Portree	247	225	17
Dingwall	771	730	64
Tain	539	496	29
Dornoch	285	260	7
Kirkwall	562	503	2
Lerwick	561	531	11
Lochmaddy	207	192	3
Stornoway	390	371	14
Arbroath	1,302	1,155	78
Forfar	1,119	1,011	54
Dundee	3,452	2,880	384
Perth	3,072	2,666	272
Alloa	956	852	100
Falkirk	2,277	2,026	257
Stirling	3,225	2,871	199
Cupar	931	854	65
Dunfermline	2,443	2,123	218
Kirkcaldy	3,962	3,614	437
Haddington	1,229	1,082	98
Edinburgh	11,356	9,557	876
Linlithgow	2,658	2,405	217
Duns	234	216	10
Selkirk	425	403	37
Jedburgh	453	428	47
Peebles	290	271	12
Glasgow	11,103	8,947	1,874
Campbeltown	381	333	32
Dunoon	583	536	73
Oban	720	621	52
Rothesay	161	155	28
Dumbarton	3,389	2,742	218
Greenock	2,089	1,918	522
Kilmarnock	5,376	4,628	736
Paisley	4,951	4,079	467
Dumfries	3,189	2,864	161
Kirkcudbright	582	523	42
Stranraer	1,022	937	113
Airdrie	2,585	2,169	379
Ayr	3,514	3,129	334
Hamilton	4,804	3,956	458
Lanark	1,184	1,026	77
Not known	56	20	3
Total	101,625	88,109	10,168

Source:
Unpublished Scottish Office statistics on criminal proceedings.

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1991

Sheriff court	Persons called to court	Persons with charge proved	Persons receiving a custodial sentence
Aberdeen	6,199	5,506	610
Banff	528	509	41
Peterhead	858	820	84
Stonehaven	940	863	22
Elgin	1,339	1,257	88
Wick	558	483	33
Inverness	2,292	2,076	228
Fort William	606	539	53
Portree	206	184	8
Dingwall	809	768	73
Tain	525	468	39
Dornoch	272	231	5
Kirkwall	349	324	10
Lerwick	461	440	17
Lochmaddy	152	140	2
Stornoway	491	450	13
Arbroath	1,334	1,203	117
Forfar	867	795	70
Dundee	3,057	2,441	285
Perth	3,314	2,947	238
Alloa	918	831	72
Falkirk	2,344	2,080	220
Stirling	3,021	2,658	171
Cupar	893	791	91
Dunfermline	2,765	2,355	299
Kirkcaldy	3,731	3,286	394
Haddington	1,144	1,049	125
Edinburgh	10,770	9,549	954
Linlithgow	2,399	2,179	203
Duns	208	191	9
Selkirk	384	361	18
Jedburgh	483	467	28
Peebles	347	328	9
Glasgow	9,169	7,435	1,498
Campbeltown	308	274	24
Dunoon	584	534	62
Oban	556	508	64
Rothesay	134	122	13
Dumbarton	3,705	3,085	197
Greenock	1,699	1,547	395
Kilmarnock	4,184	3,583	645
Paisley	3,998	3,274	416
Dumfries	2,722	2,497	165
Kirkcudbright	552	512	48
Stranraer	1,200	1,094	87
Airdrie	2,390	1,915	315
Ayr	3,056	2,669	336
Hamilton	4,944	3,976	387
Lanark	1,200	1,040	78
Not known	49	7	—
Total	95,014	82,641	9,359

Source:
Unpublished Scottish Office statistics on criminal proceedings.

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1992

Sheriff court	Persons called to court	Persons with charge proved	Persons receiving a custodial sentence
Aberdeen	6,106	5,486	745
Banff	493	468	32
Peterhead	733	700	58
Stonehaven	899	836	25
Elgin	1,252	1,173	71
Wick	595	529	68
Inverness	2,231	2,092	253
Fort William	514	483	64
Portree	213	196	8
Dingwall	866	813	69
Tain	650	578	38
Dornoch	217	196	7
Kirkwall	383	361	27
Lerwick	369	350	20
Lochmaddy	170	162	6
Stornoway	347	298	14
Arbroath	1,324	1,093	96
Forfar	974	893	51
Dundee	3,787	3,100	460
Perth	3,088	2,653	284
Alloa	815	717	70
Falkirk	2,550	2,296	288
Stirling	2,781	2,438	311
Cupar	901	810	96
Dunfermline	2,437	1,967	227
Kirkcaldy	3,375	2,973	414
Haddington	1,122	1,033	126
Edinburgh	11,736	10,385	1,022
Linlithgow	2,569	2,281	169
Duns	214	199	5
Selkirk	412	386	16
Jedburgh	554	522	24
Peebles	384	365	7
Glasgow	10,133	8,162	1,838
Campbeltown	309	257	29
Dunoon	536	499	66
Oban	501	464	57
Rothesay	144	131	22
Dumbarton	3,458	2,838	325
Greenock	1,978	1,709	388
Kilmarnock	5,129	4,272	943
Paisley	4,194	3,397	525
Dumfries	3,486	3,153	178
Kirkcudbright	641	589	51
Stranraer	1,149	1,040	93
Airdrie	2,413	1,907	379
Ayr	3,834	3,293	447
Hamilton	5,503	4,428	539
Lanark	1,165	1,009	102
Not known	30	7	1
Total	99,664	85,987	11,154

Source:
Unpublished Scottish Office statistics on criminal proceedings.

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1993

Sheriff court	Persons called to court	Persons with charge proved	Persons receiving a custodial sentence
Aberdeen	6,340	5,649	694
Banff	488	466	33
Peterhead	760	710	49
Stonehaven	915	859	22
Elgin	966	902	81
Wick	536	493	79
Inverness	1,991	1,829	256
Fort William	572	536	61
Portree	185	167	16
Dingwall	682	630	61
Tain	540	471	40
Dornoch	198	169	11
Kirkwall	335	312	15
Lerwick	340	316	20
Lochmaddy	237	216	9

Outcome of sheriff court proceedings in Scotland in 1993

Sheriff court	*Persons called to court*	*Persons with charge proved*	*Persons receiving a custodial sentence*
Stornoway	232	206	13
Arbroath	963	832	138
Forfar	1,021	924	80
Dundee	3,881	3,009	413
Perth	2,735	2,289	236
Alloa	716	655	85
Falkirk	2,747	2,408	257
Stirling	2,415	2,143	309
Cupar	935	855	87
Dunfermline	2,692	2,291	234
Kirkcaldy	3,461	3,010	469
Haddington	1,082	988	99
Edinburgh	11,292	10,096	1,346
Linlithgow	2,456	2,218	144
Duns	237	219	14
Selkirk	355	340	30
Jedburgh	517	481	46
Peebles	241	233	14
Glasgow	10,947	8,650	1,949
Campbeltown	245	219	13
Dunoon	569	511	58
Oban	444	396	50
Rothesay	125	119	31
Dumbarton	3,239	2,650	399
Greenock	2,027	1,731	521
Kilmarnock	4,122	3,538	943
Paisley	4,531	3,580	556
Dumfries	3,094	2,664	177
Kirkcudbright	588	537	51
Stranraer	925	805	73
Airdrie	2,644	2,044	386
Ayr	3,595	3,087	422
Hamilton	4,945	3,951	463
Lanark	1,046	860	88
Not known	455	6	4
	96,604	82,270	11,645

Source:
Unpublished Scottish Office statistics on criminal proceedings.

Housing

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the years between 1979–89 and 1993–94 inclusive of the total number of completed dwellings *(a)* built for rent by (i) local authorities, (ii) new towns, (iii) Scottish Homes and (iv) housing associations and housing co-operatives, *(b)* rehabilitated for rent by (i) local authorities, (ii) new towns, (iii) Scottish Homes and (iv) housing associations and housing co-operatives, *(c)* built or rehabilitated by local authorities for low-cost home ownership, *(d)* built or rehabilitated by housing associations and co-operatives for low-cost home ownership, *(e)* built or rehabilitated by private developers through GRO grant for rent and *(f)* built or rehabilitated by private developers through GRO grant for ownership.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The available information on *(a)* and *(b)* is published quarterly in the statistical bulletin series "Housing Trends in Scotland" which is available in the House Library.

(c) No information is collected centrally on local authority low-cost home ownership provision.

(d) The available information is given.

Housing association/co-operative low-cost home ownership completions

	Number
1981–82	115
1982–83	244
1983–84	156
1984–85	63
1985–86	166
1986–87	79
1987–88	388
1988–89	89
1989–90	209
1990–91	319
1991–92	400
1992–93	475
1993–94	858

(e), (f) The number of units approved is given.

GRO grant unit approvals for:

	Market rent	*Owner occupation*
1989–90	—	123
1990–91	56	1,059
1991–92	159	1,228
1992–93	309	1,617
1993–94	586	1,534

Independent Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of independent schools operating in Scotland for each financial year since 1975.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	*Number of registered independent schools*
1975–76	102
1976–77	99
1977–78	100
1978–79	98
1979–80	96
1980–81	92
1981–82	90
1982–83	90
1983–84	87
1984–85	90
1985–86	108
1986–87	115
1987–88	127
1988–89	121
1989–90	122
1990–91	123
1991–92	125
1992–93	116
1993–94	117
1994–95	117

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made of the average household income of the pupils applying for

assistance under the assisted places scheme; and what is the average household income of pupils covered by the assisted places scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Comprehensive information on the household incomes of pupils applying for assistance under the assisted places scheme is not collected centrally. No details, for example, are held on the incomes of households below the threshold at which full fee remission applies nor of those applicants who may be successful in obtaining an assisted place. Applications to join the scheme are made direct to participating schools which must administer the scheme in accordance with the statutory regulations.

Information which is available centrally shows that, in the 1993–94 school session, over 81 per cent. of the families of pupils receiving assistance had household incomes of less than £18,000 per annum, and just over 45 per cent. had household incomes below the £9,522 threshold for full fee remission.

Plastic Surgery, Ayrshire and Arran

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of plastic surgery on patients from Ayrshire and Arran is carried out within hospitals in the Ayrshire and Arran health board area; what action is being taken to increase the percentage treated in local hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* The percentage of plastic surgery in patient discharges of Ayrshire and Arran residents from hospitals within the local health board area rose from 56.8 per cent. in 1991 to 65.3 per cent in 1993, the latest full year for which figures are available.

The Ayrshire and Arran health board's draft acute services strategy states the boards' commitment to purchase more plastic surgery services locally. A new consultant plastic surgeon post to be made at Canniesburn hospital in Glasgow will further impact on local Ayrshire and Arran services as the post will cover patient consultations in Ayrshire.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 19 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judges

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of judges whose age exceeded *(a)* 65 years, *(b)* 70 years and *(c)* 75 years on 31 December 1994.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Information about judges aged 65 and over as at 31 December 1994 is set out in the table:

	Total number	*Age 65–69*	*Age 70–74*	*Age 75 and over*
Lord Chancellor	1	1	[1]—	[1]—
Lords of appeal in ordinary	10	4	1	—
Heads of division	4	[1]—	1	—
Lords justices of appeal	29	7	2	—
High Court judges	95	11	2	—
Circuit judges	512	82	16	—
District judges[1]	322	17	3	—
Stipendiary magistrates	85	11	—	—
Masters[2]	30	8	—	—

[1] including district judges of the principal registry of the family division.
[2] including bankruptcy registrars.

Mr. Ernest Saunders

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord chancellor's Department if Mr. Ernest Saunders is receiving legal aid in his appeal in the Guiness case.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Mr. Saunders has not applied for legal aid for his appeal. If he does so, the application will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the legal aid regulations.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between the Ministers and agencies in the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is currently responsible for three executive agencies—the Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office—and is accountable to Parliament for them. The relationship and division of responsibilities between him and his agencies is fully set out in the individual agencies' published framework documents. The Lord Chancellor is responsible for appointing the agency chief executives; for setting and reviewing agency targets and monitoring performance against them; for approving the corporate and business plans; for securing the provision of financial resources; for making rules and orders; and for decisions on policy issues. The Land Registry and the Public Record Office are separate departments. The Public Trust Office is part of the Lord Chancellor's Department. The agency chief executives are responsible for the day-to-day management of the agencies and are accountable to the Lord Chancellor for their effective and efficient management. As accounting officers, or in the case of the Public Trust Office agency accounting officer, the chief executives are also responsible for the proper and economical expenditure of money.

Pension Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to inform individuals awaiting pension appeal tribunal dates of the likely length of waiting time for each centre at the time of application.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are no plans at present to introduce such a scheme, which would be of limited value. In practice, the vast majority of appellants choose to have their hearing at the centre closest to where they live, even when they are aware that waiting times might be shorter elsewhere. The minority who are prepared to travel can obtain information about waiting times at other centres on request.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans his Department has to require the Independent Television Commission to produce detailed, public, measurable assessments of how the ITV companies are meeting their franchise obligations.

Mr. Dorrell: The Independent Television Commission is required to publish in its annual report where Channel 3 licensed have failed to comply with licence conditions relating to certain statutory requirements.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the progress made on the provision of subtitling and signing on television programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Subtitling is provided on Channel 3 and Channel 4 as well as on BBC television services. The Independent Television Commission is responsible for monitoring the requirements on subtitling in the Channel 3 and Channel 4 licences. The commission published its assessment in its first annual performance review in May 1994.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half-year ended 31 December 1994 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interests which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed by

testators or executors in the matter of allocation; and if he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is as follows:

Item	*To whom allocated*	*Condition/wishes*
Painting by Ferneley	National Trust	Conditional
Riding tack	National Trust	Conditional
Acland archive	National Trust	Conditional
Painting by Scott	Tate Gallery	Conditional
Architectural drawings	National Trust	Conditional
Chattels at Benthall hall	National Trust	Wish
Fitzherbert papers	Derbyshire Record Office	Conditional
House at No 2 Willow road, London NW3	National Trust	Conditional
Studio belonging to the artist McWilliam	Banbridge District Council	Conditional
Chattels at Castle Fraser	National Trust for Scotland	Conditional
Unallocated items	*Date accepted*	
Busts by Flaxman and Chantrey	12 October 1994	—
Painting by Amigoni	12 August 1994	—
Fairfax archive	12 August 1994	—
George I silver kettle and stand	24 May 1994	—
Three works by Picasso and one work by Klee	27 April 1994	—
Library furniture by Gomm	17 February 1994	—
Miniature portrait by Hilliard	15 December 1993	—

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* My Department has appointed 10 individuals to public positions in the last year who were first identified by the public appointments unit.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Executive Agencies

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what evaluation he has made of value for money in the next steps agencies.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: As described in the White Paper, "The Civil Service, Continuity and Change" Cm 2627, each next steps agency is reviewed at five-yearly intervals. The process includes an evaluation of the agency's performance by the responsible Minister which also covers value for money issues.

The record of agencies in improving effectiveness and efficiency in government is summarised in the Next Steps Review 1994, Cm 2750. It shows that, in total, agencies met 80 per cent. of their targets in 1993–94. This represents a trend of improvement over last year's figure of 77 per cent. and the previous year's 76 per cent.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Attorney-General what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental ministers and agencies.

The Attorney-General: The division of responsibilities and relationship between myself, the Treasury Solicitor and the Government Property Lawyers agency are defined in the published framework document a copy of which is in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General when he intends to reply to a letter dated 19 December from Lindis Percy of Bradford, which she copied to the hon. Member for Bradford West; if he will place a copy of the letter from Ms Percy and his reply in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: An official from my Chambers replied to Ms Percy on 16 January 1995. I have placed a copy of Ms Percy's letter and my official's response in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Disabled People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *910*, if he will list his Department's responsibilities for providing opportunities for disabled people, beyond those responsibilities which it has for its own staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Although the policy responsibility for providing opportunities for disabled people lies with other Departments, DTI is involved in a number of areas which help provide opportunities for disabled people. For example, the Department, together with the Department of Health, helps to ensure that United Kingdom companies are well placed to take advantage of the funding provided, by the European Commission, for the development of new technologies which will benefit disabled people. We are also currently engaged, together with the Foreign Office, the Department of Health and the Department of Transport, in producing promotional video which will showcase UK products for disabled people.

Together with other departments, DTI is represented on the Inter-Departmental Group on Disability which coordinates activities in this area across Government, and through which we can keep a watching brief on initiatives which might be of interest to those in this department.

The department of Trade and Industry is an equal opportunity employer and currently employs 379 staff with disabilities—there are around 10,500 staff in DTI

and its executive agencies—of whom around 10 per cent. are at grade 7 (principal) level or above.

Nuclear Power Stations (Defects)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cracks have been discovered in nuclear power stations; how many of them arise as a result of the use of Inconel 600; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: As a result of routine inspection programmes to support the operational safety cases, cracks have been identified in some of the steam header welds at the Dungeness B and Heysham 1 nuclear power stations. The precise number of these cracks is difficult to establish. Both stations remain closed while the operator, Nuclear Electric, undertakes appropriate remedial work and prepares safety cases for the return of the plants to operation. The two stations will only be brought back into operation once the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate is satisfied that it is safe for them to do so.

Inconel 600 is not used in the welds where the cracks have occurred.

Timeshare

Mr. Hunter : To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take measures to reduce or simplify the notices of cancellation which are demanded under the Timeshare Act 1992.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I intend to review these notices in the context of consultation on the measures required for implementation of the EC timeshare directive.

Coal Industry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list by pit the coal stocks included in the sale documents for British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: Detailed information about the volume of coal stocks held by the regional coal companies is commercially confidential. British Coal's total stocks of some 11 million tonnes of coal were included in the sale of the regional coal companies, with the majority going to RJB.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations underlay his decision to allow RJB Mining to pay £100 million below its tender price for British Coal.

Mr. Eggar: As outlined in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) on 2 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *939–40*, adjustments to the price bid by RJB Mining, in common with the bids of other preferred bidders, reflect developments since tenders were submitted in September 1994 or information which was not available to bidders at the time. the bulk of these adjustments relate to specific changes in expected levels of coal stock and liabilities disclosed after bids were submitted. Even after the adjustments, the price paid by RJB is substantially higher than other tenders.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the land and property in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency which was included in the sale of British Coal assets to Mining (Scotland) Ltd.

Mr. Eggar: In the time available, I am unable to confirm which of the assets transferred from British Coal to the Scottish Coal Company Ltd. fall within the hon. Member's constituency. The sites within Strathclyde region which have transferred are:

	Location
Opencast disposal points	
Dalquhandy	6 km south of Lesmahagow
Damside	12 km east of Motherwell
Killoch	7 km west of Cumnock
Knockshinnoch	9 km south south east of Cumnock
Operating opencast sites	
Airdsgreen	19 km east north east of Cumnock, Cumnock and Doon Valley district, Strathclyde region
Chalmerston	2 km north of Dalmellington, Cumnock and Doon Valley district, Strathclyde region
Dalquhandy	6 km south of Lesmahagow, Clydesdale district, Strathclyde region
Damside	12 km east of Motherwell, Motherwell district, Strathclyde region
Piperhill	9 km south west of Cumnock, Cumnock and Doon Valley district, Strathclyde region
Prospective opencast sites	
Broken Cross and Broken Cross Extension	7 km south south west of Lanark, Clydesdale district, Strathclyde region
Chalmerston North	5 km north north east of Dalmellington, Cumnock and Doon Valley district, Strathclyde region
Drumshangie	3.2 km north east of Airdrie, Monklands district, Strathclyde region
House of Water	8 km south south west of Cumnock, Cumnock and Doon Valley district, Strathclyde region
Ladylands	9 km east north east of Motherwell, Motherwell district, Strathclyde region
Leadloch	16 km east of Motherwell, Motherwell district, Strathclyde region
Powharnal	9 km north east of Cumnock, Cumnock and Doon Valley district Strathclyde region
Spireslack Revised	20 km east north east of Cumnock, Cumnock and Doon Valley district, Strathclyde region
Gasswater	6 km north east of Cumnock, Strathclyde region
Glentaggart	18 km south west of Lanark, Strathclyde region
Grievehill	8 km south east of Cumnock, Strathclyde region

	Location
Pennyvenie	2 km north east of Dalmellington, Strathclyde region
Watsonhead	12 km north north west of Lanark, Strathclyde region
Wilsontown	13 km north east of Lanark, Strathclyde region

I will write with the constituency information in due course.

Waste Incineration (Electricity Generation)

Mr. Denham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current contribution to electricity generation made by domestic waste incineration; and what estimate he has made for the future contribution to electricity generation from this source.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Electricity generating capacity fuelled by municipal or industrial waste amounts to about 106 MW from seven power stations in the United Kingdom. The third non-fossil fuel obligation order for renewables, which I made on 20 December 1994, required the regional electricity companies to contract for a further 241.87 MW of generating capacity from 20 projects. Energy from waste projects would recover value from about four million tonnes of waste per year and provide access to over 200,000 tonnes per year of ferrous material for recycling if all NFFO 3 projects were to go forward. Two of the existing projects have secured a beneficial use for the reject heat through combined heat and power operation, and developers of six of the NFFO 3 projects have declared their intention to do likewise.

Nuclear Power Industry (Subsidy)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total Government subsidy to the nuclear power industry in the United Kingdom for each year from 1979 to 1994; and what is planned for each year up to 1998, expressed in 1993 prices.

Mr. Eggar: No Government subsidies have been paid to Nuclear Electric plc or British Nuclear Fuels plc and none is at present planned. There is no record of the Central Electricity Generating Board having received nuclear specific subsidies from Government covering the period from 1979 when they were responsible for nuclear power generation. Both NE and BNFL are recipients of the fossil fuel levy paid by electricity suppliers in England and Wales. The Government have, however, been the customer for research and development and other programmes undertaken by the Atomic Energy Authority. It funds those programmes and the consequences of those programmes.

Ministerial responsibility for Scottish Nuclear Limited rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Nuclear Review

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he intends to place in the Library copies of the reports commissioned from consultants in connection with the nuclear review when they are completed.

Mr. Eggar: As was made clear in announcing the terms of reference for the review, the reports themselves will not be placed in the Library of the House. However, the announcement of the conclusions of the review will be supported by the facts and analysis of the facts relevant to our decisions.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the costs of consultants commissioned in connection with the nuclear review.

Mr. Eggar: This information is commercially confidential.

Child Labour

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will study the report sent to him by the hon. Member for Thurrock detailing the exploitation of child factory workers by the Medonna Company of Tirapur in Tamil Nadu whose products are imported into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement as to what powers he has to *(a)* prevent this exploitation and *(b)* prevent such imports.

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has received no such report.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what powers he has to prevent the importation of garments from third-world countries which have been produced wholly or in part by workers being paid low wages or by child labour; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will raise with European Union Ministers the need to halt imports of products into the European Union that have been produced by the extensive use of child labour in third-world countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government work consistently to promote ratification and observance of international agreements to curb the use of child labour. However, the practice primarily reflects poverty. It is more likely to be ended by maintaining open international trade so as to strengthen the economies of the countries concerned rather than by imposing import bans which would anyway face severe legal and practical difficulties. As to wage levels, these vary around the world and give poorer countries a competitive advantage in international markets. It is hard to see how they would be helped by import bans which would deny them this benefit.

Mercury Communications (Promotional Offer)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what complaints his office has received about unfair trading practices from the competitors of Mercury Communications about its One-2-One promotional offer to new subscribers of free telephone calls on Christmas day; if he will refer this to the Office of Fair Trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have received no complaints from competitors of Mercury One-2-One about its Christmas day offer. Representations regarding unfair trading practices would be a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which member states of the EC the prices of electricity

used by the engineering steel industry are lower than that paid in the United Kingdom; and what is his estimate of the difference between the price paid by this industry in the United Kingdom and the average in other EC states.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Information on the price of electricity used by individual industries such as engineering steel are not collected centrally by the Department of Trade and Industry, nor by the Statistical Office of the European Communities. The latest data published by the EC, which refer to prices at 1 July 1994, shows that for the majority of industrial customers, United Kingdom prices are amongst the lowest in Europe.

Prices data are taken from the latest Eurostat publication, "Rapid Reports—Energy and Industry 1994/33". Copies of these reports are held in the Library of the House. Data refer to 1 July 1994 and cover electricity prices for a number of levels of consumption. Generally United Kingdom electricity prices including all taxes and duties except VAT are among the lowest in Europe. For example:

for consumers of 30,000 kWh a year, nine of the other 11 member states had higher prices than the UK;

for consumers of 2 GWh a year, eight of the other 11 member states had higher prices than the UK; and

for consumers of 50 GWh a year, nine of the other 11 member states had higher prices than the UK.

Arms Exhibitions

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the overseas arms exhibitions with which Her Majesty's Government have assisted in the past year.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply. In the past year the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry have participated in the following overseas defence exhibitions in support of the UK defence industry's sales and marketing activities:

Asian Aerospace 94, Singapore—February 1994

Association of United States Army, Florida—February and October 1994

Defence Services Asia, Kuala Lumpur—April 1994

Indepo, Dubai—May 1994

Eurosatory 94, Paris—June 1994

1st International Remote Sensing Conference (Open Skies), Strasbourg—September 1994

Defendory, Athens—October 1994

Euronaval, Paris—October 1994

European Funds (Payments)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount of money from *(a)* the European regional development fund and *(b)* the European social fund which has been paid in each financial year between 1988–89 and 1993–94 to all local authorities within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Following is the information:

£ million

	1988–89	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
ERDF	278	319	329	507	768	679
ESF	34	93	111	134	154	188
Total	312	412	440	641	922	867

TREASURY

Central Statistical Office

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards the further development of the CSO.

Mr. Nelson: The Central Statistical Office publishes annually its future work plans in its "Programme Strategies". The most recent relates to the period 1994–95 to 1996–97. These plans are rolled forward each year and are revised in line with changes in expenditure provision and business needs.

I announced in a written answer to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), 18 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *12*, that a review of the basis on which the Central Statistical Office has been operating as an agency would be conducted. This review is now underway and, if it recommends that the Central Statistical Office should continue as an agency, then a framework document will be drawn up.

I refer also to the answer that the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave to the hon. Member for Southport earlier today in which he announced that he has commissioned work to assess the benefits that would arise from merging the Central Statistical Office with the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The results of this assessment would be taken into account in any new framework document.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the real increase in expenditure on central Government annual debt interest between 1991–92 and 1996–97; and to what this amount would equate approximately in terms of additional pence on the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Aitken: Central Government debt interest payments are projected to increase from £16.2 billion in 1991–92 to £26.0 billion in 1996–97, in cash terms. In 1993–94 prices this represents an increase of £6.7 billion.

At 1996–97 income levels the yield in a full year from an increase of one penny in the basic rate of income tax is expected to be about £2 billion.

Government Statistics

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he proposes to take to improve the co-ordination and dissemination of Government statistics.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I have agreed that the London-based staff of the Central Statistical Office and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys should be

located together at Drummond Gate, Pimlico, subject to the satisfactory completion of negotiations on the lease of the buildings in question. We expect them to move there during the latter part of 1995.

The purpose of these moves, which involve the two main statistics collecting arms of the Government Statistical Service, is to improve the efficiency and quality of Government statistics. Because of the concentration and range of skills at the new location, it will become easier to make further progress in bringing together the massive amount of statistical data currently existing in government, relating them in a meaningful way, and making them more readily available both within government and to the community generally in accordance with the thrust of open government. The co-ordination of government statistics will be improved as it will be easier to develop common standards, classifications and definitions, for use not only by CSO and OPCS but by the rest of the GSS.

CSO and OPCS will remain separate organisations accountable to myself and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health respectively. However, as well as collaborating closely on statistical issues, they will increase efficiency by sharing services wherever possible.

My right hon. Friend and I have commissioned further work to establish what additional benefits would arise from merging the two organisations, and to assess whether these, coupled with other GSS developments, would justify a merger. The intention is that, if a merger were agreed, it should take effect from 1 April 1996.

The arrangements for any merger would fully protect the interests of both organisations' customers, and of those who supply information to them.

OPCS's public search room will remain in St Catherine's house. It will need to move to alternative accommodation in central London before the current lease on St Catherine's house expires in 1999.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* Twelve.

Manufacturing Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the rate of growth of exports of United Kingdom finished manufactures to *(a)* the EEC and *(b)* the rest of the world for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: Information about exports of UK manufactures from which rates of growth may be derived can be found on the CSO database, which may be accessed through the Library of the House. Volume information is available only from 1988, but information at current prices is available from 1972.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

East Tibet

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the European Union development project in east Tibet in respect of its impact on *(a)* Tibetan culture, *(b)* groundwater pollution and *(c)* birth deformities; if he will object to the continuation of aid for this project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has had a number of representations about the Pa Nam integrated rural development project in Tibet. Before these representations were received, officials had asked the European Commission to strengthen the conditions for EU funding, to ensure it benefited local Tibetans and incorporated an environmental impact assessment.

The project includes an irrigation scheme, funded by the Chinese Government, on which work has already begun. Suspending EU support would not stop the scheme, but would delay implementation of social components designed to ameliorate its impact on local Tibetans.

Official Travel

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what categories of spouses and children of Overseas Development Administration officials travel *(a)* economy, *(b)* business or club class and *(c)* first class when their air travel is paid for by the ODA.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 20 December 1994]:* When a spouse and dependant children accompany an officer at public expense, air travel for leave purposes is normally economy class, holiday visit passages for children who remain at school in the United Kingdom are normally APEX class, and travel at the start and end of tours is normally business class.

African Development Bank

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what annual contribution was made, in each year since 1990, by Her Majesty's Government to the funds of the African development bank; how much any of these funds have been used to finance the RTZ mining project in Madagascar; what assessment he has made of the compatibility of this project with the development policies of Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* Annual United Kingdom payments to the African Development bank and fund since 1990–91 were as follows:

£000

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
AfDB	1,507	1,426	1,490	1,771
AfDF	10,758	11,617	15,382	18,055

We have been assured that the African development bank group has no involvement whatever in the Madagascar project referred to.

Mine-clearing Operations

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase co-operation with the UN for the immediate expansion of mine-clearing operations.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Most of the £7.1 million we have allocated to mine clearance work over the last three years has been in support of United Nations or UN co-ordinated programmes. We therefore stand ready to provide appropriate support to the new mines action unit of the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs in its mission to accelerate the process of land mine clearance.

Eritrea Refugees

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made by the UN in repatriating Eritrean refugees in Sudan; and what impact the recent breakdown of diplomatic relations between Eritrea and Sudan has had upon this.

Mr. Baldry: Since November 1994, the UNHCR has repatriated about 8,700 Eritrean refugees from Sudan. About 16,000 remain to be returned as part of the first phase of the repatriation programme. The recent break in diplomatic relations has not had a major impact on the programme, although it has led to increased security measures in the border area.

TRANSPORT

Public Transport Fares (London)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the annual percentage change and *(b)* the increase in child fares on London Transport in each year since 1985–86, taking 1984–85 as the base and showing the increase in both actual and real terms.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the table, for child ordinary fares only. The information is not available for child season tickets, travel cards and passes.

Child ordinary fares on London Transport

	Annual percentage change	*Fares index (1984–85=100)*	
		Actual	*Real terms*
1984–85		100.0	100.0
1985–86	18.2	118.2	111.6
1986–87	0.8	119.1	109.0
1987–88	8.0	128.6	113.1
1988–89	19.5	153.7	127.6
1989–90	18.7	182.5	140.5
1990–91	9.2	199.3	139.9
1991–92	16.4	231.9	155.4
1992–93	9.8	254.7	165.4
1993–94	3.8	264.4	168.8
1994–95	2.3	270.4	n/a

n/a not yet available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the annual percentage change and *(b)* the increase in fares on (i) London's buses, (ii) London Underground, (iii) all London Transport, (iv) Network South East and (v) British Rail in each year since 1984–85, taking 1984–85 as the base and showing the increase in both actual and real terms; and what was the annual rate of inflation for each of those years.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the tables:

Real fare indices (1984–85=100)

Financial year	*London Buses*	*London Underground*	*London Transport*	*Network South East*	*British Rail*
1984–85	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1985–86	102.5	101.3	101.7	101.2	100.9
1986–87	105.2	103.8	104.1	104.9	105.1
1987–88	106.1	106.1	105.9	106.1	106.5
1988–89	111.0	110.5	110.1	107.1	107.7
1989–90	113.6	113.8	113.2	107.7	107.9
1990–91	114.2	115.4	114.4	108.2	108.4
1991–92	119.5	121.1	119.8	113.1	113.0
1992–93	124.9	126.5	125.2	118.1	117.2
1993–94	132.6	133.9	132.7	125.1	122.0
1994–95	[1]n/a	[1]n/a	[1]n/a	[1]n/a	[1]n/a

Actual fares indices (1984–85=100)

Financial year	*London Buses*	*London Underground*	*London Transport*	*Network South East*	*British Rail*
1984–85	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1985–86	108.6	107.2	107.7	107.2	106.9
1986–87	115.0	113.4	113.7	114.7	114.9
1987–88	120.6	120.6	120.3	120.6	121.1
1988–89	133.7	133.1	132.7	129.0	129.8
1989–90	147.5	147.8	147.1	140.0	140.1
1990–91	162.6	164.4	163.0	154.1	154.4

Actual fares indices (1984–85=100)

Financial year	*London Buses*	*London Underground*	*London Transport*	*Network South East*	*British Rail*
1991–92	178.2	180.7	178.8	168.8	168.7
1992–93	192.2	194.7	192.7	181.8	180.4
1993–94	207.6	209.6	207.7	195.8	191.0
1994–95	219.6	221.8	219.8	[1]n/a	[1]n/a

Annual percentage increases in fares (actual prices)

Financial year	*London Buses*	*London Underground*	*London Transport*	*Network South East*	*British Rail*	*Rate of inflation*
1985–86	8.6	7.2	7.7	7.2	6.9	5.9
1986–87	5.9	5.7	5.6	7.0	7.5	3.2
1987–88	4.9	6.4	5.8	5.2	5.4	4.0
1988–89	10.8	10.3	10.3	7.0	7.1	6.0
1989–90	10.3	11.1	10.8	8.5	8.0	7.8
1990–91	10.3	11.2	10.8	10.1	10.2	9.7
1991–92	9.6	9.9	9.7	9.5	9.2	4.7
1992–93	7.9	7.8	7.8	7.7	6.9	3.2
1993–94	8.0	7.6	7.8	7.7	5.9	1.7
1994–95	5.8	5.8	5.8	[1]n/a	[1]n/a	[1]n/a

[1] not yet available

Road Works (Footway Provision)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his Department's policy and how it is conveyed in contracts regarding action to be taken in the absence of compliance with contract requirements regarding maintaining a safe, clear and well directed footway system through or around all road works; and how this is different from the requirements of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991;

(2) what is his policy, and how it is conveyed in contracts, in requiring a safe, clear and well directed footway system to be maintained through or around all road works.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Mr Andrew Rowe, dated 19 January 1995:

You have asked two questions of the Secretary of State for Transport about his Department's policy and how it is conveyed in contracts. The first concerns the contractual requirements for a safe clear and well directed footway system to be maintained through or around all road works and the second asks what action would be taken if these are not complied with and how they differ from those the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. As these are operational matters for the Highways Agency, I have been asked to reply.

The Specification for Highways Works sets out the detailed requirements to be included in a contract for the provision of pedestrian facilities during construction. These are contained within Clauses 117: Traffic Safety and Management and Clause 118: Temporary Diversions for Traffic. Additionally detailed provisions for a particular contract are given in numbered appendices 1/17, 1/18 and on the scheme drawings.

Under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, the Secretary of State has issued the Code of Practice, Safety at Street Works and Roadwork which sets out the requirements regarding the policy for maintaining a safe, clear and well directed footway system through roadworks. This Code clearly sets out the necessary action that a contractor has to take to ensure that the footway is defined. While this Code applies to undertakers' works carried out by or on behalf of the highway authority, the Department recommends that all those concerned with such works follow its advice.

There is no significant difference between the requirements laid down by the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 and those required of the contractor as he is obliged to comply with the contract requirements and all relevant statutes. His activities are monitored by the Engineer, appointed by the Agency to administer the contract, and his Resident Engineer. They have wide powers to draw the contractor's attention to any failure to comply with requirements and to issue instructions and directions to put matters right.

I hope this information is helpful.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total Government expenditure on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for each year since 1979 in 1993 prices.

Mr. Norris: Gross voted expenditure by DVLA—formerly DVLD—revalued to 1993–94 prices was:

	£ millions
1979–80	122
1980–81	139
1981–82	140
1982–83	135
1983–84	169
1984–85	163
1985–86	165
1986–87	170
1987–88	179
1988–89	173
1989–90	179
1990–91	188
1991–92	187
1992–93	188
1993–94	188

During this period DVLA's range of responsibilities increased significantly.

Private Finance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reductions there have been in his departmental budget, for any element of his departmental budget, or each of the years *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98 or *(e)* 1998–99 as a consequence of assumptions about attracting private finance through (i) the private finance initiative and (ii) elsewhere; and what is the monetary detail underlying any such adjustments.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department's budget is not subject to any specific adjustment to reflect private sector funding.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken to ensure that the use of commercial waterways for freight purposes is not prejudiced by recreational activity; and what steps are being taken to maintain high standards of safety on such waterways.

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency is responsible for the oversight of safety of navigation on inland waters for recreational purposes, through the district marine safety committee. British Waterways, which continues to promote both commercial and recreational use of the canal network, works closely with the district marine safety committees to ensure that safety is given the highest priority.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January *Official Report*, column *416*, what assessment he has made of the scheme agreed between the London boroughs and London Transport for the provision of travel concessions for elderly and disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: None.

Vehicle Excise Duty Exemptions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will define electrically propelled vehicles, road construction vehicles, road rollers, snow clearing vehicles, gritting vehicles, street lighting vehicles and vehicles used for short journeys between different parts of a person's land within the meaning of his proposals to receive vehicle excise duty exemption; and if he will estimate the expected revenue from each of these categories in each of the first five years of implementation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

The changes to the system of exemptions and concessions to VED contained in my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget aim to bring the archaic system of exemptions and concessions up to date, to target special treatment where it is most merited, to simplify the complex current system, and to close opportunities for tax evasion. In line with these principles, the Finance Bill contains provisions such that:

(a) electrically propelled vehicles, snow clearing vehicles and gritting vehicles will be licensed in the special concessionary class, paying VED of £35 next year;

(b) road rollers will be licensed in the special vehicles class, paying £135 or £150 depending on weight; and

(c) road construction vehicles and vehicles currently claiming exemption because they do less than six road miles a week will license in the general tax class appropriate for the particular type of vehicle. Most vehicles doing less than six road miles a week will, in fact, move into the special concessionary class and pay £35.

It is not possible to make precise estimates of the revenue which will be raised each year for all these classes. Estimates to the nearest £0.5 million are as follows:

	£ million
Electric vehicles	1.0
Road construction	1.5
Road rollers	3.5
Snow ploughs	negligible
Ice gritters	negligible
Street lighting	0.5
Short journeys	4.0

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Angola

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to, or received from, the UNITA movement in Angola.

Mr. Baldry: Our missions in Lusaka and Luanda are in regular touch with representatives of UNITA. The UNITA representative in London was received at official level at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 17 January. We have taken every opportunity to urge UNITA to implement speedily the Lusaka protocol.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Angola, urging that the protocol recently signed in Lusaka is immediately and fully implemented.

Mr. Baldry: We have taken every suitable opportunity to urge the Angolan Government to implement fully the Lusaka protocol, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to, or received from, the Government of Angola in respect of the peace process.

Mr. Baldry: My noble Friend Lord Inglewood met President Dos Santos in Lusaka on 20 November in the margins of the signing ceremony of the Lusaka protocol. We subscribed to a demarche by the European Union to the Government of Angola on 10 November and to a message from the President of the Security Council to President Dos Santos on 18 November. Most recently the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the United Nations met the Angolan Foreign Minister on 7 December.

Rapid Reaction Force

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on

the desirability of establishing a rapid reaction force under the control of the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have noted the UN Secretary-General's proposals in his Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, and believe that they will need to be studies closely, taking account of all the financial and operational implications.

We believe that the key to a faster response by the UN lies in reducing the delay in member states deploying troops, especially through tackling logistic shortcomings.

UN Peacekeeping Forces

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to improve the response times in the establishment and deployment of UN peacekeeping forces.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We support the United Nations Secretary-General's standby force planning initiative, and have provided details of British resources which could be made available to the UN on a case by case basis. We believe it is important that member states should maintain a dialogue with the UN's standby force planning team, and a British delegation will be visiting New York in the next few weeks to take this forward.

In addition, we believe that some member states could deploy more swiftly on peacekeeping operations if they had the requisite logistic support, and support the Secretary-General's proposals in his Supplement to an Agenda for Peace for close co-operation between member states in this area.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for improving the logistical support of UN peacekeeping forces in their initial stages.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made a series of proposals to the United Nations with a view to improving the logistic support for peacekeeping operations. In particular, it is essential that the operational and administrative staffs at the UN Secretariat coordinate fully, that requirements for the provision of logistic support are factored in to the planning at an early stage, and that arrangements for letting contracts are taken forward as soon as a decision has been taken by the Security Council to launch or expand a mission. In addition, it is essential that there should be an appropriate combination of military and commercial logistic back-up, and that decisions on expenditure should be delegated to field level whenever possible.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what lessons he has learnt from the establishing of UN peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda; and what steps he is taking to remedy any inadequacies or errors.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN operations in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda have been undertaken in widely differing political circumstances, and with varying degrees of security in theatre.

Nevertheless, all these operations have demonstrated the importance of ensuring that the mandates for such missions are clear and precise; that peacekeeping operations must remain impartial and operate with the consent of the parties; that it is essential to maintain unity of command; and that the success of operations depends on member states making available the necessary resources in terms of both personnel and funding.

Iran

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Iran Government's reaction to the UN resolution alleging human rights violations in Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Iranian Government have yet to respond substantively to the Resolution passed on 23 December 1994 by the United Nations General Assembly. We urge the Iranian Government to respond positively by improving its behaviour and reducing cause for international concern with its record. If, as they have previously stated, the Iranians contest the accuracy of the information presented by the special representative they should let him visit Iran to investigate the situation for himself.

Israel

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Israeli Government on the effect on the peace process of expansion of Israeli settlements in areas that are the subject of negotiation with the Palestinian national authority.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We consider that all settlements in the occupied territories, including east Jerusalem, are illegal and an obstacle to peace. With our EU partners, we are in frequent contact with the Israeli Government, whom we regularly remind of their obligations under the fourth Geneva convention. The EU issued a statement on 5 January which called for the total cessation of work on settlements.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and commonwealth Affairs what recent progress has been made in releasing Palestinian prisoners held by the Israelis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: When Peres and Arafat met in Gaza on 9 January, they agreed to establish a joint committee and an Israeli ministerial panel to consider further prisoner releases. We have repeatedly called on the Israelis to speed up prisoner releases as a confidence-building measure.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs whether, under the terms of the Oslo agreement, the election of a Palestinian self-governing authority depends upon the withdrawal of Israeli troops.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Article XIII of the declaration of principles on redeployment of Israeli forces states:

> 1. After the entry into force of the Declaration of Principles, and not later than the eve of elections for the Council (Palestinian Interim Self-Government authority), a redeployment of Israeli military forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will take place, in addition to the withdrawal of Israeli forces (from the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area).
>
> 2. In redeploying its military forces, Israel will be guided by the principle that its military forces should be redeployed outside populated areas.

3. Further redeployments to specified locations will be gradually implemented commensurate with the assumption of responsibility for public order and internal security by the Palestinian police force pursuant to Article VIII above (on Public Order and Security).

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government about the desirability of holding early elections.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have continually urged on both the Israelis and the Palestinians the importance of maintaining momentum in their negotiations over elections and the related question of redeployment in the west bank. Early elections would contribute to genuine peace in the region.

Kenya

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the high commission in Nairobi on the extent of ethnic clashes in the Rift valley in Kenya just before Christmas; and what the role of the Kenyan Government was in this activity.

Mr. Baldry: There were no clashes between different ethnic communities in the areas at that time.

Somalia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the causes of current unrest in north-west Somalia and the impact on British organisations working in the area.

Mr. Baldry: It is still not clear whether the unrest was caused by outsiders trying to destabilise the Egal administration or whether there has simply been a contest of local clan interests.

Under the state of emergency declared by the administration, all international agencies have been banned from Hargeisa until further notice. British organisations are now focussing their efforts on the humanitarian needs of the 150,000 Somalis displaced by the dispute. Operations outside Hargeisa have been largely unaffected by the unrest.

Eritrean Refugees

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made by the UN in repatriating Eritrean refugees in Sudan; and what impact the recent breakdown of diplomatic relationships between Eritrea and Sudan has had upon this.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 8,706 Eritrean refugees have so far been repatriated from Sudan since the beginning of the project organised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in November 1994.

UNHCR reports that the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Sudan and Eritrea has had very little effect on the programme. It expects to repatriate a total of 25,000 refugees by the end of April this year.

EC Own Resources

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects that the 31 October 1994 Council decision on the system of the European Communities own resources will have been ratified in all member states.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the member states concerned, since under article 201 of the treaty of European Union it depends on the completion of their respective constitutional requirements. I understand that the necessary procedures are under way in most, if not all, member states and that a number are likely to complete these procedures shortly.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which member states have so far adopted the Council decision on the system of the European Communities own resources in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements as laid down under article 201 of the treaty on European Union; and on what dates.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that three member states have so far adopted the own resources decision, in accordance with their constitutional requirements.

Denmark: 16 December 1994;

France: 20 December 1994; and

United Kingdom: Royal Assent received on 16 January 1995.

Iraqi Assets

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total current value of Iraqi assets held by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom does not hold any Iraqi assets. However, the Bank of England advises that the value of Iraqi assets frozen in the United Kingdom was $784,000,000 as at 30 June 1994. This figure includes private as well as Iraqi Government deposits.

PRIME MINISTER

Worcester (Visit)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make an official visit to Worcester.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 19 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Drug Education

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to co-ordinate the Department of Trade and Industry with the Departments of Health and Education in respect of drug education and solvent abuse.

The Prime Minister: The Government recognise the threat of solvent abuse and, principally through our health promotion, prevention and education initiatives, are working to tackle the problem. The Department of Health has the main policy responsibility and works as necessary alongside other Departments, including as appropriate the Departments for Education, Trade and Industry, and the Home Office.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Policy Objectives

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the objectives of Her Majesty's Government's policy for Northern Ireland for 1995.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We will continue to build on the progress already made towards securing permanent peace, economic prosperity and a widely acceptable comprehensive political settlement founded on the principles of democracy and consent.

Criminal Justice System

13. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to bring the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland into line with that in the rest of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: The Government are preparing a number of measures to improve the operation of the criminal justice system. Many of these are based upon examples and experiences from other parts of the UK while taking into account the particular needs of Northern Ireland.

Fair Employment

14. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to reform the Fair Employment Act 1989.

15. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review the case for additional power to be given to the Fair Employment Commission.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I await the outcome of the review of employment equality in Northern Ireland now being undertaken by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.

Radio Transmissions (Health and Safety)

16. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what reports he has received on the health and safety implications of radio transmissions in Crossmaglen.

Sir John Wheeler: A report has been received, produced by Coghill Research Laboratories and entitled, "Electro Magnetic Fields and Radiation and Health in Crossmaglen".

Illegal Weapons

17. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many illegal weapons have been recovered or surrendered since the beginning of the ceasefire.

Sir John Wheeler: In the period from 1 September to 31 December 1994, 31 firearms and one mortar launcher were recovered.

Trade Union Talks

18. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will next meet trade union representatives to discuss the future prospects for new jobs and economic development in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

27. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next plans to meet the Irish Congress of Trade Union to discuss the peace process.

Mr. Ancram: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to meet representatives of the Northern Ireland committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions soon to discuss issues raised in its recently published document, "Investing in Peace—an Interim Programme for Reconstruction".

Fuel Prices

19. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the trend on fuel prices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: Statistical information on changes in fuel prices is collected on a United Kingdom-wide basis. Information on regional variations is not available.

Post-ceasefire Talks

20. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place with groups representing victims of sectarian violence regarding their role in the post-ceasefire talks.

Sir John Wheeler: None; nor am I aware of a desire on the part of groups representing victims of violence to play such a role.

Disability Benefits

21. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many unsuccessful *(a)* invalidity benefit and *(b)* disability living allowance applications have been appealed in the last six months.

Mr. Moss: In the period June 1994 to November 1994 a total of 583 invalidity benefit and 1,001 disability living allowance appeals have been received in the Social Security Agency.

Budget Estimates

22. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what adjustments have been made to the Northern Ireland Office budget estimates as a consequence of the cessation of violence.

Sir John Wheeler: As my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 6 December, the outcome for Northern Ireland of the 1994 public expenditure survey

reflects a reallocation of some £180 million from the law and order protective and miscellaneous services vote made in the light of the terrorist ceasefires. This figure represents a major reduction in the anticipated resource requirement for criminal damage compensation payments across the survey period, and reduced expenditure on RUC overtime and is a welcome boost which will benefit important economic and social programmes.

Any resumption of terrorist violence will, of course, require a restoration of this reallocated provision.

Economic Development

23. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr. Ancram: The Northern Ireland economy has performed well over the last year. Employees in employment in Northern Ireland rose by 1.2 per cent. in the year ending September 1994. Unemployment, seasonally adjusted, fell by 7.7 per cent. in the year ending November 1994. In addition, the output of Northern Ireland manufacturing industry expanded by 4.4 per cent. between the second quarter of 1993 and the second quarter of 1994.

Irish Language

24. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what new proposals he has to increase the use of the Irish language.

Mr. Ancram: The Government seek to encourage respect for, and appreciation of, cultural diversity in Northern Ireland and to respond positively, where practical, to soundly based requests for assistance for Irish language projects. On 6 December 1994 a draft order was laid before Parliament which includes a power to enable district councils to erect street names in a second language, other than English. In practice, the second language is most likely to be Irish.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to enable students wishing to study at a non-denominational institution to train to be teachers in Irish-medium schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many non-denominational educational establishments currently offer courses in Irish as a main or subsidiary subject in primary phase initial teacher training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: One.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Department of Education for Northern Ireland intends to take to improve the design and content of the BEd course in Celtic at St. Mary's College; which interest groups are being consulted; when changes are likely to be implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: My Department is examining proposals from the college for a re-designed course which takes into account the views expressed by various interest groups. Changes are unlikely to be in place before September 1996.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the research projects undertaken during the past five years at St. Mary's college, Belfast into the teaching of Irish in Irish-medium schools; what public funding was provided for them; what research obligations are imposed on teacher training college lecturers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: No empirical research projects have been undertaken. There are no research obligations imposed on college lecturers.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the BEd course in Celtic at St. Mary's college, Belfast has been retained specifically for the purpose of training students to teach in Irish-medium primary schools; what percentage of this course is taught and assessed through the medium of Irish; what percentage of the teaching material is in the Irish language; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The decision to retain the course took account of the then growing needs of the Irish-medium primary schools. All of the course is taught and assessed through the medium of Irish and approximately 80 per cent. of the teaching material is in the Irish language.

Water Industry

25. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the water industry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: The Government are committed to the privatisation of water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. However, as already announced, this will not be possible in the lifetime of the present Parliament. In the interim, as announced on 29 June 1994, *Official Report*, columns *550-51*, it is intended to establish the Department of the Environment's Water Executive as a next steps agency not later than 1 April 1996.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

26. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he is reviewing the duties and deployment of the RUC.

Sir John Wheeler: Operational policing is a matter for the Chief Constable, but there are no current plans to change the authorised establishment or structure of the RUC.

Framework Document

28. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the publication of the framework document.

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the oral answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Derbyshire North-East (Mr. Barnes) earlier today.

Primary School Pupils

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of pupils enrolled at each controlled primary school in the constituencies of Belfast, West and Belfast, North in each of the past five years.

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

Enrolments

Schools	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Belfast, West					
Blackmountain	137	144	148	135	138
Blythefield	232	252	267	264	274
Donegall Road	258	265	274	280	280
Fernhill	293	292	267	270	269
Forth River	181	191	188	195	200
Glencairn	131	134	136	140	118
Springfield	129	136	151	157	164
Springhill	393	393	388	404	402
Suffolk	213	177	179	164	169
Vere Foster	315	319	312	321	305
Belfast, North					
Ballygolan	141	144	145	151	157
Ballysillan	150	155	168	176	173
Carr's Glen	458	477	472	489	497
Cavehill	370	377	382	379	372
Cliftonville	250	262	272	269	285
Currie	156	144	137	141	158
Edenbrook	285	315	345	335	345
Glenwood	551	579	578	583	582
Grove	309	307	298	308	273
Ligoniel	105	93	83	82	80
Lowood	321	330	316	313	302
Seaview	409	429	436	429	439
Straidhavern	40	51	49	61	73
Wheatfield	322	312	317	318	318

Pensioners

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in rank order the percentage of the population of pension age and above in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The latest information is taken from the Northern Ireland 1991 census of population and is as follows:

Parliamentary Constituency	*Percentage*
Belfast, East	22.70
Belfast, South	20.56
Belfast, North	18.90
North Down	17.77
Strangford	16.50
East Antrim	16.33
North Antrim	15.38
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	14.79
Belfast, West	14.60
South Down	14.46
East Londonderry	13.56
Upper Bann	13.50
Mid Ulster	13.23
Newry and Mourne	13.20
Lagan Valley	12.62
South Antrim	12.01
Foyle	10.88

Mr. Bowden: To ask the secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list in rank order the total number of people of pension age and above in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: The latest information is taken from the Northern Ireland 1991 census of population and is as follows:

Parliamentary constituency	*Total number*
North Down	16,139
South Down	15,871
Belfast, East	15,616
Strangford	15,255
East Londonderry	14,919
North Antrim	14,712
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	14,708
Belfast, South	14,194
Belfast, North	13,920
East Antrim	13,811
Mid Ulster	13,491
Lagan Valley	13,157
Newry and Mourne	12,874
Upper Bann	12,675
Foyle	12,394
South Antrim	11,549
Belfast, West	11,262

Housing

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by Housing Executive region the total numbers on housing waiting lists and the number of A1 applicants.

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. I am advised by its chief executive that the total numbers on the housing waiting list and the number of applicants with A1 status at 31 December 1994, by Housing Executive region, were as follows:

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Region	*Waiting list*	*A1 applicants*
Belfast	7,297	704
South East	4,257	278
South	2,531	120
North East	4,137	225
West	4,518	483
Total	22,740	1,810

Stormont (Fire)

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which companies have recently been carrying out refurbishment work at Parliament buildings, Stormont.

Mr. Moss: The main contractor for the current refurbishment scheme is McCombe Brothers (Antrim) Ltd. The nominated sub-contractors are Weir and McQuiston Ltd. for electrical services, Stothers (Mechanical and electrical) Ltd. for mechanical services and Express Lift Co for lift services.

Downpatrick Area Plan

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to upgrade

and revise the Downpatrick area plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The Department has a programme of area plan work and I regret that it will be several years before a review of the Down area plan can begin. However, the housing needs and development pressures of Downpatrick are monitored on a continuous basis and, if necessary, proposals can be considered as amendments to the existing plan.

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the attendance figures for 1994 reported by the Ulster museum, including its outstations, with the percentage change from 1993.

Mr. Ancram: In 1994 a total of 269,046 people visited the Ulster museum and the Armagh county museum—an increase of 0.28 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1993.

Driving Licences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information will appear on the new plastic card type driving licence when it is introduced; what will be the dimensions of the card; and what plans he has to make the new style licence common throughout *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Community countries.

Mr. Moss: There has been a plastic card to accompany the NI driving licence since 1985. I will be launching a new style credit card size plastic card later this month. The information which will appear on the new style card is as follows:—surname, main forename, date and town of birth, date of expiry, driver number, sample signature and photograph of holder. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea plans to introduce a plastic card in the UK from 1 July 1996. It is up to each individual member state to decide how best to meet EU requirements on driving licences.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the original time scale for the introduction of a plastic card type driving licence in Northern Ireland; and when he now expects it to be introduced.

Mr. Moss: There has been a plastic photographic counterpart to accompany the Northern Ireland driving licence since 1985. A new style credit card size plastic card is being launched in Northern Ireland later this month. Further changes may be required to meet the requirements of the second EC directive on driver licensing which will come into effect on 1 July 1996. The final format of the licence is still under discussion.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the paper part of the Northern Ireland driving licence was increased in size when the European Communities model was introduced, and not designed so that it could be folded down to the dimensions of the former licence.

Mr. Moss: The size of the paper part of the NI driving licence is subject to the requirements of the first EC directive on driver licensing. It was increased in size from January 1991 to meet those requirements and to accommodate the inclusion of lorry and bus entitlements. The paper part of the NI driving licence is the same size as the GB licence. The design of the paper part so that it could fold to the dimensions of the former licence was constrained by the fact that it had to comply with the 1st EC directive.

EMPLOYMENT

Northern Region

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will rank, in order of the reductions of unemployment achieved, the initiatives taken by his Department in the Northern region.

Miss Widdecombe: The Government are reducing unemployment throughout the United Kingdom by following sound economic policies based on permanently low inflation, removing unnecessary regulations which obstruct job creation, and by active measures to help unemployed people. These policies have already helped reduce unemployment by more than 550,000 in the United Kingdom as a whole and by nearly 16,000 in the Northern region.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the annual budgets for each TEC for each year since their creation.

Mr. Paice: Funding made available to each training and enterprise council in England, for each year since their creation, for activities funded by the Employment Department, is shown in the following table:

TEC Budgets 1991–92 1994–95

	1991–92 £ million	*1992–93 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*
Hampshire	32.00	34.13	37.18	35.51
Heart of England	10.50	12.18	12.89	13.33
Isle of Wight	4.30	4.26	4.79	4.55
Kent	31.60	35.13	41.17	37.30
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire	7.10	8.04	10.74	10.54
Surrey	13.30	13.83	15.18	14.72
Sussex	24.20	27.16	28.52	28.40
Thames Valley Enterprise	19.60	21.21	29.22	31.90
Aztec	11.10	11.73	15.76	13.93
Centec	12.70	24.24	31.30	28.36
Cilntec	9.10	22.62	29.24	24.78
London East	28.70	35.90	47.73	42.70

TEC Budgets 1991–92 1994–95

	1991–92 £ million	*1992–93 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 £ million*
North London	10.40	18.92	23.95	22.54
North West London	5.80	10.03	14.82	13.55
Solotec	18.90	20.12	24.12	20.72
South Thames	22.10	32.92	47.26	41.80
West London	9.80	17.27	21.71	20.39
Bedfordshire	12.60	11.72	14.37	14.89
Cambstec	6.60	6.37	8.66	10.23
Essex	28.50	35.49	37.65	36.14
Greater Peterborough	8.40	9.30	12.01	12.65
Hertfordshire	19.20	24.81	27.98	27.60
Norfolk and Waveney	23.90	22.57	27.48	27.01
Suffolk	14.70	15.54	18.15	20.13
Avon	28.60	28.84	34.26	32.84
Devon and Cornwall	52.50	52.47	63.14	52.27
Dorset	15.20	16.53	20.71	17.87
Gloucestershire	12.80	13.92	16.49	14.64
Somerset	12.50	13.75	15.36	14.52
Wiltshire	12.30	14.66	17.22	14.75
Birmingham	46.70	49.77	51.89	41.56
Central England	10.90	11.71	12.90	12.35
Coventry and Warwickshire	26.20	25.38	32.88	29.88
Dudley	11.20	11.72	13.97	12.12
Hawtec	10.30	11.81	14.66	13.61
Sandwell	11.40	11.99	14.52	14.04
Shropshire	13.40	14.68	16.04	13.83
Staffordshire	34.00	35.60	40.04	33.07
Walsall	10.60	9.99	11.49	9.37
Wolverhampton	11.50	12.12	13.59	11.68
Greater Nottingham	20.90	20.98	25.64	22.42
Leicester	25.40	26.21	28.84	25.27
Lincolnshire	19.20	20.70	28.46	25.76
North Derbyshire	11.20	10.58	12.92	11.91
North Nottinghamshire	17.50	17.12	18.74	18.00
Northamptonshire	12.80	13.76	15.54	14.45
Southern Derbyshire	17.80	18.33	20.50	18.68
Barnsley and Doncaster	27.30	25.08	33.01	27.58
Bradford and District	19.20	20.75	23.77	19.21
Calderdale and Kirkless	21.40	21.39	30.75	23.31
Humberside	37.60	37.77	42.40	37.28
Leeds	22.50	21.34	27.48	22.41
North Yorkshire	17.40	17.56	20.21	17.96
Rotherham	12.50	12.54	15.11	12.37
Sheffield	27.50	23.38	30.90	25.35
Wakefield	12.60	12.54	15.39	12.72
Bolton and Bury	13.50	14.38	16.90	15.31
Cumbria	18.60	17.68	20.33	19.13
Eltec (East Lancashire)	18.00	18.80	23.18	20.94
Lawtec (Lancashire West)	26.80	28.35	33.69	30.76
Manchester	39.10	39.31	46.00	41.37
Metrotec Ltd (Wigan)	12.00	11.29	13.01	12.41
Normidtec	11.82	14.57	17.63	15.91
Oldham	9.10	9.19	10.60	9.62
Rochdale	7.80	8.87	11.09	10.34
South and East Cheshire	11.10	12.83	16.12	14.86
Stockport/High Peak	9.90	10.47	12.82	11.52
Cewtec	22.30	20.96	26.45	22.85
Merseyside	40.10	51.00	68.49	53.29
Qualitec	9.60	9.83	12.71	9.38
County Durham	34.70	30.09	36.03	29.22
Northumberland	15.30	15.28	18.08	15.13
Sunderland City	21.40	18.47	24.23	20.02
Teesside	35.50	33.48	41.00	34.50
Tyneside	45.80	40.45	52.46	45.19

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the latest available information on entrants who have entered *(a)* community action and *(b)* training for work by (i) whether male or female, (ii) duration of employment, (iii) ethnic origin and (iv) whether they have a disability, for each region and for Great Britain as a whole.

Miss Widdecombe: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who are currently unemployed for each year between the ages of 40 and 50 years.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest information is given in the following tables:

ILO Unemployment Rates: By Age and Sex, Great Britain Summer 1994

Age	Percentages Males	Females
40	7.9	3.6
41	7.0	4.6
42	7.9	4.4
43	7.9	5.2
44	8.0	4.6
45	6.0	4.2
46	7.9	6.3
47	6.4	4.8
48	7.3	4.3
49	7.2	4.4
50	8.4	3.3

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Claimant Unemployment Rates: By Age and Sex, United Kingdom 1994

Age	Percentages Male	Female
40–49	8.8	3.1

Source:
Employment Gazette.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many individuals unemployed in the years 1979, 1985 and 1994 were previously self-employed.

Mr. Oppenheim: Latest estimates from the summer 1994 Labour Force Survey for Great Britain show that there were 235,000 people who were ILO unemployed and who reported their employment status in their last job as being self-employed. Comparable figures for 1979 and 1985 are not available.

Unemployed Persons (Mortgages)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many individuals who became unemployed in each year from 1979 to 1994 were previously self-employed with mortgages outstanding on their homes.

Mr. Oppenheim: The available information from the summer 1994 Labour Force Survey for Great Britain shows that there were 92,000 ILO unemployed people, resident in households buying their accommodation with a mortgage or loan, who reported their employment status in their last job as self-employed. Equivalent figures for summer 1993 and summer 1992 are 121,000 and 114,000 respectively. No comparable figures are available prior to 1992.

Objective 3 Funding

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will publish local authorities' allocations of funds from the European social fund objective 3; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Allocation of funds for objective 3 of the European social fund for 1995, on the basis earlier agreed by the objective 3 monitoring committee, were notified to sector managers and members of the monitoring committee, which includes local authority representatives, earlier this month.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the unsecured and secured creditors being dealt with by the receiver for the South Thames training and enterprise council;

(2) if he will list the names of individuals and organisations who are creditors of South Thames TEC in *(a)* the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford and *(b)* the London borough of Lewisham.

Mr. Paice: The only secured creditor for South Thames training and enterprise council is the Employment Department. Other creditors are a matter for the receiver and I understand that he is assembling a list.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were undergoing training on programmes contracted for by South Thames TEC on 1 December 1994 and 1 January 1995 in the constituency of Lewisham, Deptford, in the London borough of Lewisham, and in total.

Mr. Paice: This information is available only for the South Thames area as a whole. It is not broken down by constituency or borough. Figures for the South Thames area are shown in the following table:

South Thames training and enterprise council—Estimated trainees for the boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham and Greenwich

Date	Number
Youth training and training credits	
4 December 1994	2,750
1 January 1995	2,693
Training for work	
4 December 1994	3,359
1 January 1995	3,316
Total	
4 December 1994	6,109
1 January 1995	6,009

The figures are subject to final submission and verification of all accounting period 9 and 10 claims.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed by the South Thames TEC on 1 September 1994, 1 December 1994 and 1 January 1995.

Mr. Paice: I understand that South Thames training and enterprise council had 162 employees on 1 September 1994, 162 employees on 1 December 1994 and 128 employees on 1 January 1995.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the number of people employed by training providers and business support programmes which were party to South Thames TEC contracts as of 1 December 1994 in *(a)* the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford and *(b)* the London borough of Lewisham.

Mr. Paice: This information is not collected either by South Thames training and enterprise council or by the Employment Department.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 16 January to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), *Official Report*, column *331*, if he will list the providers of training and business support programmes within the area covered by the South Thames TEC to whom letters of comfort have been issued, and those to whom no such letters have been sent.

Mr. Paice: As the information is contained in a large list, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

Employment Regulations

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what representation he has made to the EEC about the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981; and when he expects a response;

(2) what are the implications for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 of the revision of the definition of undertakings, with particular reference to compulsory competitive tendering;

(3) what proposals he has to recognise those contractual liabilities arising from redundancy liabilities under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 which may be incapable of being passed to incoming contractors if the regulations are changed.

Mr. Oppenheim: Various representations have been made to the European Commission about the 1977 acquired rights directive, to which the regulations give effect, including concerns about its application to the contracting out of activities and the damaging effect it may have on the rescue of insolvent businesses. In September the Commission produced a proposal to amend the 1977 directive which aimed, inter alia, to distinguish between the transfer of only an activity of an undertaking and the genuine transfer of an undertaking; and to provide for greater flexibility in insolvency situations.

The proposal is still under discussion. It is too early to say when agreement will be reached or what changes to the regulations, or transitional arrangements, may be required.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Pensions

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what resources he has allocated to the War Pensions Agency to ensure that welfare officers have advised all disabled war pensioners of their statutory rights concerning disregard on local authority charges.

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Joan Walley, dated 18 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about resources allocated to ensure that the War Pensions Agency Welfare Officers advise all disabled war pensioners of their statutory rights concerning disregards on local authority charges.

It is incumbent upon welfare officers to provide a professional and effective advice service to all disabled war pensioners with whom they come into contact. As part of that service, welfare officers would normally cover advice regarding statutory rights concerning disregards on local authority charges. In addition, information on the statutory rights to disregard of local authority charges is contained in leaflets issued to all successful claimants to War Pension, under standard procedures.

The exact information you request on the resources allocated to this specific activity is not available, as resources are not allocated on an individual advice item basis. I can however tell you that the total resources allocated to the welfare service during the current year, which include this area of advice, is £5.6 million.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Mortgage Internet Payments

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost of mortgage interest payments to people in receipt of income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated annual amount of mortgage interest included in the assessment for people in receipt of income support is £1,082 million—source: income support statistical inquiry February 1994.

Doncaster and Mexborough Benefit Offices

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list for the Doncaster and Mexborough benefit offices how many claims for assistance from the social fund have been made during each of the last 12 months; and what the figure was for each year since 1990;

(2) what is the current average length of time taken to decide on an application for assistance from the social fund *(a)* nationally and *(b)* at each of the Benefits Agency offices in the Doncaster and Mexborough area.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking for details of the number of claims made to the Social Fund (SF) and the current average clearance times for these applications both nationally and in the Benefits Agency's Doncaster and Mexborough offices.

Although information is available relating to Doncaster, information relating specifically to Mexborough is not available in the exact format requested. Prior to the formation of the Benefits Agency in April 1991 Mexborough formed part of Rotherham South. Figures have therefore been provided at Annex A for the total number of applications to the SF in 1990/91 for both Doncaster and Rotherham South. From april 1991 Mexborough became one of four offices making up the Rother and Dearne District and information has been provided at Annex B for the total number of claims to the SF from 1991/92 to 1993/94 at Doncaster and Rother and Dearne Districts.

At Annex C I have provided figures for the number of claims to the SF at the Doncaster and Rother and Dearne Districts in each of the last twelve months.

It is not possible to provide the current average length of time taken to decide an application for assistance from the SF because statistics are not collated in this way. However, I have provided at Annex D figures showing the percentage of claims cleared within two varying timescales; these are provided at a national level and for the Doncaster and Rother and Dearne Districts.

Copies of all the Annexes have been place in the Library.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number and proportion of all pensioners had no income from any source other than from state benefits for each year since 1990.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

All pensioner units with no income from any source other than State benefits

Year	Number million	Proportion per cent.
1990	1.1	16
1990–91	1	15
1992	1.1	15

Notes:

1. Estimates taken from the family expenditure surveys 1990, 1990–91 and 1992.
2. Figures for 1990 and 1991 were combined due to sample size problems.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioner households has been dependent on state benefits for at least 50 per cent. of their income for each year since 1990.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The percentage of pensioner units dependant on state benefits for at least 50 per cent. of their income was 71 per cent. in 1990, 70 per cent. in 1990–91 and 70 per cent. in 1992.

Notes:

1. Estimates taken from the family expenditure surveys 1990, 1990–91 and 1992.
2. Figures for 1990 and 1991 were combined due to sample size problems.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples had incomes below one half of average household income in each year since 1979.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Consistent estimates are available for the years shown in the table.

Proportion of pensioners with net income below half the contemporary average for the whole population

		1979	1981	1987	1988–89	1990–91	1991–92
Single pensioners	BHC	(16)	(9)	(23)	(31)	(34)	(29)
	AHC	(12)	(8)	(22)	(42)	(44)	(40)
Pensioner couples	BHC	(16)	(11)	(20)	32	33	29
	AHC	(21)	(16)	26	33	31	28

Notes:

1. Analysis is based on equivalised household income from the households below average income series. Estimates in brackets () are particularly sensitive to the choice of equivalence scale used. The results for single pensioners, for any one period of time, are highly sensitive to the assumptions employed in adjusting income for household size. For example, the BHC figure for single pensioners in 1979 of 16 per cent. could, on alternative assumptions, be anywhere between 3 per cent. and 53 per cent. The picture of changes over time is not so sensitive to the choice of assumptions. For more information on this see appendix 4 of "Households Below Average Income: a statistical analysis 1979–1991/92", a copy of which is in the Library.
2. BHC means before housing costs; AHC means after housing costs.
3. 1988–89, 1990–91, 1991–92 refers to data from the combined calendar years eg. 1988–89 means 1988 and 1989 combined.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the state pension for *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples would have been in April 1995 had the pension been uprated in line with the higher of the retail price index or earnings since 1980.

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is estimated that the weekly rate of category A basic retirement pension would be £79.45 from April 1995 and the combined rate of category A and category B basic retirement pension payable to a couple would be £127.15 if the rates had been increased in line with the higher of earnings or prices since 1980.[1] Expenditure on retirement pension would, as a result, be increased by an estimated £9.7 billion in the 1995–96 financial year.[2]

Notes:

[1] Estimates provided by Department of Social Security, analytical services division—in each step of the calculation the benefits have been rounded to the nearest 5p;
the retail price index (all items) as published by the Central Statistical Office has been used for prices uprating;
earnings upratings have been calculated on the basis of the Employment Department's average earnings index (whole economy unadjusted) as amalgamated in the abstract of statistics published by the Department of Social Security, analytical services division.

[2] Estimate provided by the Government Actuary's department based on benefit rates calculated as per note 1.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioner households has been dependent on state benefits for at least 75 per cent. of their income for each year since 1990.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The percentage of pensioner units dependant on state benefits for at least 75 per cent. of their income was 50 per cent. in each of the years 1990, 1990–91 and 1992.

Notes:

1. Estimates taken from the family expenditure surveys 1990, 1990–1 and 1992.
2. Figures for 1990 and 1991 were combined due to sample size problems.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of all pensioners, single pensioners and pensioner couples have total incomes of *(a)* £1, *(b)* £2, *(c)* £3, *(d)* £4 and *(e)* £5 above income support levels.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the tables.

Table 1: The number of pensioner benefit units with incomes in ranges up to £5 above income support (IS) threshold

000s

Range	Single pensioners	Pensioner couples	All pensioners
£0—£1	40	20	55
£1—£2	50	30	85
£2—£3	65	25	90
£3—£4	55	25	80
£4—£5	45	25	75

Table 2: Proportion of pensioner benefit units with incomes in ranges up to £5 above income support (IS) thresholds

Percentage

Range	Proportion of all single pensioners	Proportion of all pensioner couples	Proportion of all pensioners
£0—£1	1	1	1
£1—£2	1	1	1
£2—£3	1	1	1
£3—£4	1	1	1
£4—£5	1	1	1

Notes:

1. Caseloads figures have been rounded to the nearest 5,000, and the percentages have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.
2. The figures may not sum due to rounding.
3. A pensioner benefit unit is based on the pensions definition of a pensioner which is:
(i) Single pensioner—a single male aged 65 or over or a single female aged 60 or over
(ii) Pensioner couple—a couple where the husband is over state pension age.
4. Estimates are modelled results using data drawn from the 1990, 1991, 1992 family expenditure survey, uprated to 1994–95 prices and benefit levels.
5. The definitions of income used in the tables is income taken into account for IS purposes and excludes certain types of income, such as, attendance allowance, housing benefit and the portion of war pensions covered by IS disregards.

Social Fund

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social fund funeral payments were *(a)* claimed and *(b)* awarded in Blyth Valley in each year since 1989.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Ronnie Campbell, dated 18 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of funeral payments claimed and awarded in Blyth Valley.

Information is not available for 1989–90 and has therefore been provided at Annex A from 1990–91. With the formation of the Benefits Agency in April 1991 Blyth office became one of four offices making up the Northumberland District. Although information has been provided relating specifically to Blyth for 1990–91, from 1991–92 such information is not available and has therefore been provided for the Northumberland District.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A

Applications and awards for funeral payments at Blyth Local Office

Local Office	Year	Application type	Number of applications	Number of awards
Blyth	1990–91	Funeral payment	88	59

Applications and awards for funeral payments at Northumberland district

District	Year	Application type	Number of Applications	Number of Awards
Northumberland	1991–92	Funeral payment	270	196
	1992–93	Funeral payment	312	228
	1993–94	Funeral payment	376	292

Pensioners' Savings

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what weekly income pensioners with more than £3,000 savings are deemed to be receiving therefrom; and what assumptions as to interest rates lie behind this calculation.

Mr. Roger Evans: For income support claims, a deduction from benefit of £1 a week is made for each £250, or part of £250, held above £3,000 up to the upper capital limit of £8,000. Similar rules apply in housing benefit and council tax benefit, but the effect of the tapers which apply to those benefits means that housing benefit is only reduced by 65p and council tax benefit by 20p for each £1 above a set level. Additionally, a higher upper capital limit of £16,000 applies in housing benefit and council tax benefit. The formula for taking account of capital above £3,000 does not imply any particular return on investments. It ensures that help is targeted on those with the least resources, while not entirely denying help to those with moderate capital.

Child Support

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will respond to the report of the Fifth report of the Social Security Committee, Session 1993–94, HC 470, on the operation of the Child Support Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We have considered carefully the recent report of the Social Security Select Committee and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to receive the report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration on the operations of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I have received the report today, and I am considering it carefully. While I am disappointed that the agency has not met the standards of efficiency and administration it would have wished, I note that the ombudsman recognises that steps have been taken in all cases he investigated to avoid a repetition of errors. Measures to improve quality, accuracy and customer service will be an important component of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's response to the Social Security Select Committee.

HIV/AIDS (Discrimination)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list organisations representing people with HIV/AIDS who responded to his Department's consultation on Government measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Hague: Over 1,100 responses to the consultation document were received, including those from the following organisations: the Terrence Higgins Trust; United Kingdom Forum on HIV and Human Rights; National Network of Body Positive Groups; the Scottish AIDS Monitor; AIDS and Housing Project; Blackliners; Positively Women and the Cambridge AIDS Helpline.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how housing benefit transitional payments will be treated from April.

Mr. Roger Evans: With fewer than 4,000 people expected to remain eligible for housing benefit transitional payments from April 1995, we have decided to convert future potential payments to lump sums. These payments will be made as soon as possible after 5 April. The transitional payments unit in Glasgow will then close.

Disabled People (Discrimination)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish an analysis of the responses to the Governments' recent consultation document on discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Hague: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the document "A Government Consultation on Measures to Tackle Discrimination against Disabled People: An Analysis of the Responses."

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Veal Crates

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has made in the Council of Ministers to ban veal crates in the European Union.

Mrs. Browning: In negotiations leading to the adoption of Council directive 91/629/EEC on the welfare of calves, the United Kingdom pressed hard for a text which would rule out the veal crate as a production system. A text falling short of this objective was adopted by majority vote with the United Kingdom voting against. It has remained our objective since then to get this matter re-considered.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he has not relied upon article 3b of the treaty of Rome to impose a ban on the export of calves for veal production.

Mrs. Browning: Legal advice is that recourse to article 36 would not be possible for this purpose. There is Community legislation occupying the field and a ban on the export of calves for veal production would not be justifiable as proportionate in relation to animal welfare objectives.

Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will define the word "loosely" as used in the December fisheries agreement in respect of the basing of control of fishing effort in western waters on member state quota entitlements.

Mr. Jack: I cannot identify the reference to which the hon. Member refers. The agreement reached at the December Fisheries Council provides for effort levels to allow each member state, for each fishery, to take up fully its fishing possibilities for species subject to TACs, whether allocated or not, as well as species not subject to TACs.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why he assures United Kingdom fishermen, in his letter after the December Fisheries Council, that no new measures to control effort will need to be imposed on the United Kingdom industry; and whether his assurance is given in the light of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 being brought into force or dropped.

Mr. Jack: The agreement reached at December Fisheries Council states that effort levels will be set to allow member states to take up fully their fishing possibilities for TAC and non-TAC species and that an acceptable way for a member state to regulate fishing effort will be for it to monitor the activity of its fleet and to take appropriate action if, on this basis, the effort reaches—or is about to reach—the permitted effort level. So long as present effort levels do not increase, it should not be necessary to impose new measures to control effort.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many French, Spanish and Dutch fisherman have been prosecuted in the last year by the Commission in relation to fishing offences; what were the offences; and what penalties were imposed.

Mr. Jack: None. Responsibility for enforcement of the common fisheries policy, including action to prosecute fishermen for fishing offences, rests with member states.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff in his Department

have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The number of staff within MAFF who have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer, as required under the civil service management code, since February 1993 and who made and application to join the company is one in both cases.

State Veterinary Service

Mr. Cox : To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the British Veterinary Association to discuss the future of the State Veterinary Service.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Neither my right hon. Friend, nor I have yet had the pleasure of meeting the British Veterinary Association; however, I have a meeting arranged in February. The BVA met the previous Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) on 5 May 1994 when a number of matters were discussed but not, I believe, the future of the State Veterinary Service.

WALES

Hip Replacements

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hip replacement operations have been carried out in each year from 1983 to 1993.

Mr. Richards: Estimates of the number of complete and partial hip replacement operations carried out as a principal or subsidiary procedure are given in the following table:

Year	*Number*
1983–84	1,8[illegible]
1984–85	1,[illegible]
1985–86	1,894
1986–87	1,985
1987–88	1,697
1988–89	2,167
1989–90	2,297
1990–91	1,944
1991–92	2,699
1992–93	2,897

Source:
Hospital Activity Analysis 1983–84 to 1990–91. Patient Episode Database for Wales 1991–92 onwards. Complete data for 1993–94 are not available.

Organ Donors Register

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have responded to advertisements by his Department for the organ donors register since September 1994; how many have received application forms; when he expects to have responded to all inquiries; and if he will make a statement on the delays to date.

Mr. Richards: The Welsh Office has to date received 1,174 inquiries in response to the advertisement for the new NHS organ donor card; all have been acknowledged. The Central Office of Information is in the process of producing a bilingual version of the new organ donor card and these will be dispatched as soon as possible.

Community Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the value and number of properties purchased and owned by health authorities and departments of social services for the purposes of community care specific to the need to close institutions that previously housed those individuals now living in such properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not available centrally.

Overhead Power Lines

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of research into the effects of overhead power lines on the health of individuals in close proximity.

Mr. Richards: The Government obtain advice on radiation risk from the National Radiological Protection Board, which has concluded that there is no persuasive biological evidence of a cancer risk to people living near sources of electrical supply.

The United Kingdom national case control study of childhood cancer is a long-term study which is currently examining the possible influence of a number of agents, including exposure to electromagnetic radiation, on the incidence of childhood cancer. The findings of the study will be published in about three years' time.

Internet

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if all higher education institutions in Wales are connected to the Janet computer system and Internet.

Mr. Richards: Yes.

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if *(a)* the Welsh Development Agency, *(b)* the Development Board for Rural Wales and *(c)* the Welsh tourist board are connected to the Internet system.

Mr. Redwood: The Development Board for Rural Wales has recently been connected to the Internet system. The Welsh Development Agency and the Wales Tourist Board are making plans to do so.

Welsh Language

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the public bodies in Wales that have been given notice by the Welsh Language Board to propose a scheme in accordance with section 5 of the Welsh Language Act 1993.

Mr. Richards: No public bodies will be given notice to prepare a Welsh language scheme until guidelines as to the form and content of such schemes, issued under section 9 of the Act, have been approved by my right hon. Friend and by Parliament. The Welsh Language Board is currently consulting on draft guidelines.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current number of cattle aged 30 months or under with enzootic bovine leukosis; what was the figure 12 months ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are currently no clinical cases of enzootic bovine leukosis in cattle in Wales and there were none 12 months ago.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of Dourine were reported in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No cases of Dourine have occurred in Wales since 1985.

Tir Cymen

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what effect the reduction in grant aid to the Countryside Council for Wales is going to have on the budget available for Tir Cymen schemes in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend is anxious to ensure that the reduction in the Countryside Council for Wales' grant-in-aid should not affect the Tir Cymen scheme. He has therefore agreed the provision of an additional £500,000 in the council's grant-in-aid for 1995–96, which will enable a further 200 or so farmers to participate in the scheme next year.

Local Authorities (Local Purchasing)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has received from training and enterprise councils in Wales of the additional employment secured by ensuring a policy of local purchasing where possible by local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: This information is not collected centrally.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in respect of *(a)* each county council, *(b)* each district council and (c) each of the proposed unitary councils and for Wales as a whole the estimated amount of money which his office will provide to fund the cost of local government reorganisation.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has announced total funding of £43 million for 1994–95 and 1995–96.

The sum of £20 million is being provided for information technology changes in the form of supplementary credit approvals. An SCA of £38,955 was issued to each county and district council on 31 October—a total of £1.753 million. The remaining £18.247 million will be distributed to the unitary authorities according to a formula, consultation on which does not finish until 3 February. The allocations set out in the following table are therefore provisional. £3.5 million will be provided to district and county councils in 1995–96 for compensation costs, again in the form of SCAs. The Welsh Office will be discussing the distribution arrangements with the local authority associations in due course. My right hon. Friend informed the House on 14 December that, if some authorities decided to make major administrative savings at the point of reorganisation, he would make more money available to facilitate this.

Finally, £19.5 million will be provided to the unitary authorities in 1995–96 for their running costs. The distribution is set out in the following table. I am pleased to be able to announce that this funding will, subject to the approval of the House, take the form of special grant. I expect the necessary report to be laid shortly and to be debated at the same time as the other local government finance reports for 1995–96.

Funding for local government reorganisation during 1995–96. Figures are rounded to the nearest £1,000

Unitary authority	*Running costs* [1] *£000*	*Information technology* [2] *£000*
Anglesey	797	715
Caernarfonshire and Merionethshire	942	858
Aberconwy and Colwyn	937	952
Denbighshire	869	836
Flintshire	903	881
Wrexham	890	863
Powys	916	962
Cardiganshire	795	612
Pembrokeshire	883	854
Carmarthenshire	979	1,107
Swansea	963	959
Neath and Port Talbot	958	979
Bridgend	837	667
The Vale of Glamorgan	830	658
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	1,024	965
Merthyr Tydfil	790	606
Caerphilly	979	1,007
Blaenau Gwent	799	718
Torfaen	812	734
Monmouthshire	804	724
Newport	842	774
Cardiff	952	817
Wales	19,500	18,247

Notes:

[1] Subject to approval of the House, to be paid as special grant.

[2] Supplementary credit approvals. Provisional allocations only.

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the attendance figures for 1994 reported by the National Museum of Wales, including its outstations, with the percentage change from 1993.

Mr. Richards: A total of 872,936 people visited the National Museum of Wales during 1994, a decrease of 8.3 per cent. over the attendance reported for 1993.

Private Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many private in-patients and out-patients were treated in NHS hospitals; and what was the total income earned from private patients in each of the last five years, and by health authority.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Information on the number of private in-patient cases, out-patient attendances and day case attendances is given in the table. Individual patients may appear more than once in the table.

Health authority area[1]	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94[2]
In-patient cases[3]					
Clwyd	388	419	394	365	370
East Dyfed	637	348	195	154	106
Gwent	48	106	109	99	140
Gwynedd	229	244	272	171	110
Mid Glamorgan	297	173	230	146	144
Pembrokeshire	135	159	79	44	64
Powys	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	111	118	118	119	97
West Glamorgan	149	193	161	159	173
Wales	1,994	1,760	1,558	1,257	1,204
Out-patient attendances[3]					
Clwyd	2,267	3,167	2,511	2,343	2,187
East Dyfed	2,441	1,839	1,779	1,809	1,254
Gwent	70	78	65	90	130
Gwynedd	290	367	235	289	266
Mid Glamorgan	672	692	881	491	239
Pembrokeshire	1,534	1,489	1,673	1,225	1,259
Powys	—	—	—	5	—
South Glamorgan	1,058	1,163	1,008	733	752
West Glamorgan	624	917	863	963	1,029
Wales	8,956	9,712	9,015	7,948	7,116
Day case attendances[3]					
Clwyd	513	129	103	103	145
East Dyfed	452	151	92	114	135
Gwent	47	105	116	126	106
Gwynedd	182	117	258	126	132
Mid Glamorgan	139	126	168	151	174
Pembrokeshire	149	85	60	46	81
Powys	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	5	8	4	1	2
West Glamorgan	364	504	346	357	251
Wales	1,851	1,225	1,147	1,024	1,026
Income (£ thousands)[4]					
Clwyd	433	543	605	651	775
East Dyfed	355	259	250	215	242
Gwent	77	141	167	220	374
Gwynedd	238	260	270	181	155
Mid Glamorgan	99	147	231	282	339
Pembrokeshire	129	130	133	155	96
Powys	—	—	—	2	1
South Glamorgan	136	152	253	246	450
West Glamorgan	171	222	264	302	478
Wales	1,638	1,854	2,173	2,254	2,910

[1] Figures for NHS trusts have been allocated to the health authority area in which they are situated.
[2] Provisional.
[3] The number of patients refer to those treated privately i.e. accommodation and treatment were paid for by the patient.
[4] Income figures include all fees from privately treated patients as well as money received from NHS patients paying for accommodation in single rooms or small wards.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *372*, what percentage of total admissions was represented by emergency hospital admissions.

Mr. Richards *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The information is given in the following table:

Immediate admissions as a percentage of all hospitals admissions

Area of treatment	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93
Clwyd	43.8	43.3	52.7	41.2	38.8
East Dyfed	46.3	45.6	46.8	42.8	42.0
Gwent	47.7	46.3	45.9	46.0	42.2
Gwynedd	52.4	44.7	44.2	43.9	44.1
Mid Glamorgan	42.2	43.8	43.0	42.2	41.1
Pembrokeshire	60.9	62.6	64.6	43.7	40.6
Powys	50.1	53.2	52.9	46.7	42.7
South Glamorgan	37.8	40.8	43.7	42.5	39.5
West Glamorgan	44.0	44.8	44.5	41.5	41.2
Wales	44.5	44.6	46.3	42.8	40.9

HEALTH

Home Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* home helps and *(b)* district nurses per 1,000 people over the age of 65 years there were in England for each of the years 1989 to 1993; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: For England, figures are available only for home helps employed by social services departments. They do not take account of home helps in the independent sector, including those working in services that have been contracted out. For home helps directly employed by SSDs only, the figures for 1989 to 1993 are 7.5, 7.4, 7.2, 7.1 and 6.6 respectively.

The figures for district nurses are shown in the table.

Number per 1,000 people aged 65 and over	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
District nurses	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2

Sources:

The home help figures are derived from the annual Department of Health census of local authority social services staff.

The district nurses figures are derived from the Department's non-medical work force census.

The population data used are the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys mid-year figures for England.

Northumberland Ambulance Service

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff have been employed by the Northumberland ambulance service for each year since 1987.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for 1987 to 1992 are not available centrally. As at 30 September 1993, there were 680 whole-time equivalents employed by Northumbria Ambulance Service national health service trust.

Health Centres

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health centres in each of the English regional health authority areas have been sold to general practitioners in each year since 1987;

(2) what assessment she has made of the benefits and disbenefits of selling health centres to general practitioners.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities and national health service trusts should regularly review their property portfolios in the context of how patient services should best be provided. Decisions about sales are for regional health authorities or individual NHS trusts to make. There are no figures available centrally showing how many sales of health centres to general practitioners have been completed since 1987.

Community Care

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department is undertaking into use by local authorities of the independent sector in their provision of community care services.

Mr. Bowis: Local authority use of the independent sector is continuously monitored through regular statistics collected by the Department on residential accommodation and day and domiciliary services, which separately identify services provided by the independent sector.

The Department has also commissioned research on the mixed economy of care, which will look at local authority provision in all sectors.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients admitted to accident and emergency units were aged 75 years or over in each year since 1991.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Ordinary admissions and day cases: accident and emergency

	All ages	*75 and over*	*75 and over (per cent.)*
1990–91	82,015	12,875	15.7
1991–92	83,173	13,077	15.7
1992–93	83,281	12,632	15.2

Cold Weather Deaths

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of deaths for each of the years 1980 to 1994 linked to cold weather; and what percentage of those people were aged over 60 years.

Mr. Bowis: No estimate of deaths linked to cold weather can be made.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given by her Department to the funding of a television advertising campaign advising parents of the steps that can be taken significantly to reduce the risk of cot deaths; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The use of television and press advertising was an essential element of the "Back to Sleep" campaign launched in 1991, when the advice being promoted about a baby's sleeping position represented a significant departure from most parents' practice at the time. The success of this approach is evident both from the dramatic fall in the number of cot deaths that has since occurred—from 1,008 in 1991 to 442 in 1993, England and Wales—and from recent evidence about changes that have taken place in infant care practice. Now that the message about sleeping position has become widely accepted, the Government consider that the current initiatives designed to provide comprehensive advice represent a practicable means of helping parents.

Advice on reducing the risks is widely available. First, good practice advice on baby care is available to pregnant women and new parents through direct contact with midwives, health visitors, general practitioners, obstetricians, and paediatricians in the course of routine care. Secondly, advice is included in the Health Education Authority's publications, *the Pregnancy Book* given free to first-time pregnant women, and *Birth to Five*, given free to first-time parents. Thirdly, the Department of Health leaflet, *Reducing the Risk of Cot Death*, continues to be available and almost 5 million have been distributed to date.

The recently announced national anti-smoking campaign managed by the Health Education Authority further supports initiatives on cot death. The campaign, which is intended to reduce smoking among adults, and especially parents, is particularly relevant to cot death as smoking is known to be a major risk factor.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount of correspondence she has received on the issue of cot deaths over *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* since 17 November 1994.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the amount of correspondence received in the Department as at 17 January in which this subject was the primary topic, is contained in the table.

Date		*Numbers*
18 January 1994 to 17 January 1995	Correspondence answered by Ministers	172
	Correspondence answered by officials	235
17 November 1994 to 17 January 1995	Correspondence answered by Ministers	152
	Correspondence answered by officials	188

"Purchasing in Practice"

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many copies of the first issue of the NHS Executive's publication "Purchasing in Practice" were published; how much they cost to design, print and distribute; and how frequently the NHS Executive intends to produce this publication in future.

Mr. Sackville: A total of 20,000 copies of the first issue of the National Health Service Executive's bi-monthly newsletter, "Purchasing in Practice", were issued in December 1994 at a unit cost of 65 pence for design, printing and distribution. We regard this publication as a vital part of keeping all interested parties, particularly health authorities and general practitioner fundholders, informed about new developments to ensure health care purchasing is developed for the benefit of all patients.

Illegal Employment (Children)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will commission a study of the extent of the illegal employment of children.

Mr. Bowis: No. No significant evidence has been submitted to us to suggest that this is a problem in England.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the extent of the illegal employment of children as defined by the Employment of Children Act 1973.

Mr. Bowis: The framework of protection in England for children who work is contained in the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. Detailed controls are in local authority byelaws. We are aware of no significant evidence that the illegal employment of children is a widespread problem. The situation in Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will review the reporting by proper authorities of suspected illegal employment of children.

Mr. Bowis: It is for local authorities to take what action they think necessary to control the employment of children.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration her Department has given to evidence gained in the United States of America or in any other country in regard to the value of the drug beta interferon in the treatment of multiple sclerosis; and whether she concludes from the evidence that the drug is of sufficient value to justify an early decision to license it for use within the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: Several companies are developing interferons for use in multiple sclerosis. These will be handled through the new European centralised licensing procedure-regulation 2309/93. Expert advice will be taken through the European procedure on all the evidence supplied, regardless of source country, to determine whether the product should receive an authorisation for use in countries within the European Union.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients will be involved in trials of new drugs

designed to assist those suffering from multiple sclerosis; and when it is expected that these trials will be completed.

Mr. Sackville: At least seven new drugs are currently undergoing clinical trials in patients with multiple sclerosis. Since many of the trials are on-going, it is not possible to give the numbers of patients involved nor to give information on the completion dates of the trials.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 11 January, *Official Report*, column *145*, if she will consult with the relevant professional bodies in regard to the need to use suitable X-ray film for the detection of chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Mr. Sackville: The Department would need more information before it could have a meaningful discussion with the relevant professional bodies. If the hon. member would care to write giving full details consideration will be given to opening discussions with the profession.

National Blood Authority

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total cost of writing to all blood donors about the reorganisation of the National Blood Authority.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 9 December 1994 at column *400*.

Patients' Complaints

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, column *323*, on patient complaints, if she will now publish the information for 1993–94.

Mr. Malone: Information on patient complaints for 1993–94 will be published as soon as possible.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *401*, on NHS expenditure, how much has been spent on private psychiatric care in each year since 1991–92.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter on private health insurance of 1 December 1994 to the Minister for Health.

Mr. Malone: I replied on 17 January 1995.

Secure Beds

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric beds and medium secure beds there were nationally and in each region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Eye Tests

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the savings to the national health service budget since the abolition of the free eye test; and what would be the cost of restoring the free eye test (i) to all, (ii) to those over 60 years and (iii) those aged 65 years and over.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* Assuming the trend in sight tests apparent before the announcement of changes in November 1987, it is estimated that £70 million was saved in 1989–90 by restricting entitlement to national health service sight tests.

On the basis that this trend continues, and with the sight test fees remaining at the 1994–95 level, the cost of restoring free sight tests is estimated to be in the order of:

a) all people: £110 million
b) those aged 60 and over: £30 million
c) those aged 65 and over: £20 million

Nurses

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each year since 1981, on the same basis as tables A and C of "Statistical Bulletin 1944/11", the total numbers of whole time equivalent qualified and unqualified nurses and midwives, the total numbers of learners and the total numbers of other nurses and midwives employed in *(a)* the hospital and community health services, *(b)* the family health services and *(c)* private hospitals, nursing homes and clinics, and also the total numbers of Project 2000 students in each year.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The information is shown in the tables.

Table 1: Nursing and Midwifery staff by qualification (excluding agency staff and Projected 2000 students) England as at 30 September each year

whole-time equivalents

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Total nurses and midwives	388,010	394,040	394,680	393,740	397,030	397,240	397,910
Qualified	212,100	219,300	223,310	227,740	234,130	236,770	239,360
Unqualified	95,410	94,190	92,510	90,160	91,640	92,250	93,980
Learners	80,510	80,560	78,860	75,850	71,160	68,220	64,560
Unknown	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Total nurses and midwives	397,650	398,050	395,360	392,200	378,790	361,460
Qualified	241,780	244,220	242,340	243,250	246,570	241,850

whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Unqualified	92,930	91,730	90,450	90,550	90,850	91,950
Learners	62,940	62,100	58,840	47,340	34,740	21,040
Unknown	—	—	3,730	11,050	6,630	6,620

Source:
PD(STATS) B Non-Medical Workforce Census

Table Ia: Project 2000 students England as at 30 September each year

whole-time equivalents

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Project 2000 students	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Project 2000 students	—	—	3,000	10,500	18,300	28,000

Source:
PD(STATS)B Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Table II: Nursing and midwifery staff in the NHS and private sector hospitals, homes and clinics (excluding agency staff) England as at 30 September each year

whole-time equivalents

	1981	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Total NHS and private sector	308,750	337,560	343,150	349,250	364,070	376,470	336,110
Total qualified staff	213,340	232,960	238,720	245,110	254,690	260,950	242,130
NHS:							
HCHS qualified staff	212,100	219,300	223,310	227,740	234,130	236,770	239,360
HCHS unqualified staff	95,410	94,180	92,510	90,160	91,640	92,250	93,980
FHS practice nurses	1,240	1,450	1,660	1,920	2,210	2,500	2,770
Private hospitals, homes, clinics:							
qualified staff	n/a	12,210	13,750	15,450	18,350	21,680	n/a
unqualified staff	n/a	10,420	11,920	13,990	17,730	23,270	n/a

whole—time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Total NHS and Private Sector	394,640	408,140	419,010	435,160	451,820	464,200
Total Qualified Staff	271,100	277,920	282,470	289,340	297,050	297,980
NHS:						
HCHS qualified staff	241,780	244,220	242,340	243,250	246,570	241,850
HCHS unqualified staff	92,930	91,730	90,450	90,550	90,850	91,950
FHS practice nurses	3,480	4,630	7,700	8,780	9,120	9,600
Private hospitals, homes, clinics:						
qualified staff	25,840	29,070	32,430	37,310	41,360	46,530
unqualified staff	30,610	38,490	46,100	55,270	63,920	74,270

Source:
Nursing and Midwifery: PD(STATS)B Non—Medical Workforce Census.
FHS Practice Nurses: General Medical Practitioners Census.
Private Sector Nursing: Annual K036 returns.
Notes:
1. All figures are rounded to the nearest ten whole—time equivalents.
2. Totals may not equal sum of their component parts due to rounding.
3. Table II excludes learners and 'other' nursing and midwifery staff.
4. All nursing and midwifery figures exclude agency staff.
5. (—) denotes a zero value.
6. (n/a) denotes the figure is unavailable.
7. In Table II the figures for 'Total qualified staff', 1988 and 1993, differ from those published in the Statistical Bulletin 1994/11 due to practice nurses being incorrectly excluded from the total in Table 'C' of the Statistical Bulletin. The 'HCHS qualified staff' and 'HCHS unqualified staff' figures for 1988 in Table II have also been amended in this parliamentary question.

EDUCATION

Tribunal Decisions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list by college and by individual case the number of industrial tribunal and fair employment tribunal applications lodged against further education colleges in England for each year since 1990; how many cases have been upheld against the further education colleges; how many cases have resulted in a settlement which has involved payments being made by an education and library board; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Information concerning industrial tribunal matters is not held by this Department. Industrial tribunals are the responsibility of the Employment Department. Education and library boards are not a matter for this Department.

School Finances

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list by local education authority the total amount of balances held by schools in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: For the financial year ending on 31 March 1994, the following table provides the information requested in respect of all LEAs from whom the Department has received outturn statements prepared for that year under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Total balances in schools—Year ending 31 March 1994

LEA	*Balance £K*
Avon	19,624
Barking/Dagenham	1,707
Barnet	4,279
Barnsley	3,046
Bedfordshire	8,297
Berkshire	7,985
Bexley	2,013
Birmingham	16,696
Bolton	2,291
Bradford	5,632
Brent	4,545
Bromley	3,134
Buckinghamshire	5,254
Bury	2,225
Calderdale	2,330
Cambridgeshire	6,585
Camden	N/A
Cheshire	16,196
City of London	38
Cleveland	8,169
Cornwall	7,241
Coventry	4,802
Croydon	N/A
Cumbria	2,844
Derbyshire	12,475
Devon	10,340
Doncaster	4,735
Dorset	12,301
Dudley	1,317
Durham	7,799
Ealing	2,971
East Sussex	5,990
Enfield	4,778
Essex	23,612
Gateshead	1,577
Gloucestershire	6,240
Greenwich	N/A

Total balances in schools—Year ending 31 March 1994

LEA	*Balance £K*
Hackney	2,171
Hammersmith/Fulham	2,366
Hampshire	25,542
Haringey	3,352
Harrow	1,640
Havering	3,544
Hereford/Worcestershire	13,855
Hertfordshire	20,397
Hillingdon	2,231
Hounslow	4,969
Humberside	7,764
Isle of Wight	1,487
Isles of Scilly	N/A
Islington	N/A
Kensington/Chelsea	1,386
Kent	11,675
Kingston	774
Kirklees	3,868
Knowsley	2,078
Lambeth	5,325
Lancashire	32,976
Leeds	4,587
Leicestershire	15,750
Lewisham	4,270
Lincolnshire	6,891
Liverpool	N/A
Manchester	3,146
Merton	2,996
Newcastle	4,271
Newham	4,694
Norfolk	9,199
North Tyneside	372
North Yorkshire	11,470
Northamptonshire	10,067
Northumberland	3,667
Nottinghamshire	15,275
Oldham	322
Oxfordshire	11,951
Redbridge	3,247
Richmond	2,440
Rochdale	211
Rotherham	930
Salford	2,456
Sandwell	5,742
Sefton	5,584
Sheffield	5,116
Shropshire	N/A
Solihull	4,504
Somerset	6,665
South Tyneside	1,861
Southwark	3,513
St. Helens	3,941
Staffordshire	9,160
Stockport	2,741
Suffolk	13,500
Sunderland	1,897
Surrey	4,986
Sutton	1,303
Tameside	1,303
Tower Hamlets	8,189
Trafford	1,055
Wakefield	3,643
Walsall	3,594
Waltham Forest	N/A
Wandsworth	3,228
Warwickshire	N/A
West Sussex	4,499

Total balances in schools—Year ending 31 March 1994

LEA	*Balance £K*
Westminster	3,195
Wigan	4,144
Wiltshire	7,341
Wirral	3,249
Wolverhampton	4,155

Notes to table:

1. The figures, derived from outturn statements prepared by LEAs for 1993–94 cover all county and voluntary schools, and special schools in the case of the eight LEAs whose LMS schemes covered them in 1993–94. They also include the final balances shown in respect of schools which became grant-maintained during the course of the financial year.
2. All figures represent surplusses net of deficits.
3. "N/A" denotes that the LEA's outturn statement has not yet been made available to the Department.

Higher Education Students

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimate of the total number of full–time students in higher education not living in their family or parental home in each of the last five years.

Mr. Boswell: Data on the numbers of full–time students in higher education not living in their parental or family home are not collected centrally. However, local education authorities in England and Wales provide data on the various rates of grant paid by them in mandatory awards made to students domiciled in their areas. Award holders living with their parents while attending their courses normally receive a parental home rate of grant. Students who live away from the parental home while studying normally receive a different rate, as do those who are treated for awards purposes as independent of their parents and who live in their own homes while attending their courses. The numbers of award holders not in receipt of the parental home rate in the academic years 1988–89 to 1992–93—the latest year for which data are available—are shown in the table.

Number of mandatory award holders not in receipt of the parental home rate of grant[1]
England and Wales 1988–89 to 1992–93

Academic year	*Number*
1988–89	288,200
1989–90	302,500
1990–91	443,900
1991–92	496,700
1993–93	583,800

[1] The table includes students who receive partial or nil maintenance grants because of high parental or other income.

Student Housing

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what study has been undertaken of the need for, and provision for, student housing in England and Wales.

Mr. Boswell: We are not aware of any studies of student residential accommodation needs and provision in England and Wales. These are matters for universities and colleges which, as independent, autonomous bodies, are responsible for making their own decisions about any student accommodation requirements for their students.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many new units of accommodation for students in higher education have been provided in each of the last five years.

Mr. Boswell: The information is not collected centrally.

National Curriculum

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will set the proficiency standards in safety skills and survival required by key stage 2 in respect of school swimming; how she intends to ensure these standards are met; and what resources are made available;

(2) in respect of each local education authority, what assessment she has made of the achievement in respect of safety and skills and survival in respect of key stage 2 of the national curriculum; and which authorities and schools have failed to meet these standards.

Mr. Forth: The revised national curriculum for physical education requires that, by the age of 11, all pupils should be taught to swim unaided, competently and safely, for at least 25 m. They should also be taught the principles and skills of water safety and survival. These requirements begin to come into effect on 1 August 1996.

Detailed advice on safe practice in the teaching of swimming is included in the handbook "Safe Practice in Physical Education", which was first published in 1985 by the British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education. A revised edition of the handbook was published in 1990 with the approval and recommendation of the, then, Department of Education and Science. The handbook includes advice about recommended teacher-tutor qualifications, supervision, pupils behaviour, pool safety and equipment. The handbook is currently subject to further revision and will be republished later this year.

The proficiency of individual pupils in reaching the standards prescribed in the national curriculum for physical education will be assessed by their teachers under arrangements which will be given statutory force in due course. The regular cycle of four-yearly inspections by the Office for Standards in Education will look, among other things, at each school's effectiveness in implementing the national curriculum, including the national curriculum for physical education. My right hon. Friend expects to begin to receive information about the standards achieved in relation to the national curriculum requirements, including safety skills, from the 1996–97 school year when these requirements come into force.

The Government have already supported with specific grant £900 million of local authority expenditure on the implementation of the national curriculum since 1989. It is up to schools and local education authorities to decide how to deploy their total resources in the light of local priorities and needs.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the Government's policy on the minimum number of students required for a viable sixth form.

Mr. Boswell: The number of students required for a sixth form to be viable will vary according to the circumstances of individual schools.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each local authority area in England and Wales the minimum, maximum and average numbers of students in sixth forms for each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Boswell: Information on the size of sixth forms in maintained secondary schools in each local education authority in England is shown in the table. Information on schools in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Size of sixth forms in maintained secondary schools in each LEA in England 1992–1994 Position in January each year

	1992			1993			1994		
	Smallest	*Largest*	*Average*	*Smallest*	*Largest*	*Average*	*Smallest*	*Largest*	*Average*
Corporation of London	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Camden	70	277	165	48	284	177	31	298	170
Greenwich	36	392	119	37	380	130	20	319	129
Hackney	40	125	72	105	127	117	116	123	120
Hammersmith	26	315	86	12	331	73	14	309	63
Islington	80	213	142	60	137	89	71	151	94
Kensington and Chelsea	155	341	248	157	336	247	144	297	221
Lambeth	4	76	35	14	104	45	15	32	22
Lewisham	37	208	84	20	207	93	48	200	103
Southwark	39	64	52	9	51	30	8	52	30
Tower Hamlets	11	297	100	27	325	128	16	307	126
Wandsworth	23	294	133	27	318	156	28	326	154
Westminster	87	275	162	96	292	164	92	314	163
Barking	61	199	116	71	194	122	50	204	119
Barnet	80	225	157	83	223	160	100	227	158
Bexley	86	109	99	91	118	105	89	194	129
Brent	45	302	131	4	333	149	46	315	153
Bromley	81	224	149	88	242	148	83	239	148
Croydon	139	191	171	158	196	176	127	190	161
Ealing	39	316	145	11	264	120	108	219	180
Enfield	78	235	137	76	238	147	51	277	143
Haringey	49	223	107	51	217	120	43	211	109
Harrow	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Havering	50	295	163	68	278	163	59	286	163
Hillingdon	12	227	106	15	271	123	19	292	126
Hounslow	93	249	135	82	265	143	78	258	143
Kingston upon Thames	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merton	152	201	183	182	235	212	185	224	204
Newham	2	150	74	13	176	84	49	175	118
Redbridge	95	302	176	102	331	194	132	311	197
Richmond upon Thames	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sutton	144	197	161	147	191	166	78	184	127
Waltham Forest	123	123	123	127	127	127	99	120	110
Birmingham	38	258	124	26	262	136	33	238	128
Coventry	13	220	119	24	214	124	37	247	118
Dudley	96	165	131	121	173	147	123	165	144
Sandwell	68	182	111	50	174	109	64	164	113
Solihull	123	191	168	148	214	186	146	211	176
Walsall	51	204	98	40	229	111	14	223	107
Wolverhampton	9	224	96	42	221	103	48	226	103
Knowsley	48	185	104	45	201	108	31	172	91
Liverpool	15	222	106	25	226	110	13	247	109
St. Helens	2	310	146	67	271	170	92	283	166
Sefton	9	272	139	85	262	152	82	281	156
Wirral	82	168	134	89	206	147	76	209	144
Bolton	42	284	191	48	352	208	51	329	214
Bury	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Manchester	41	233	121	33	204	106	13	213	81
Oldham	25	181	76	11	168	74	87	176	135
Rochdale	131	315	219	141	395	243	132	397	243
Salford	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Stockport	276	276	276	112	451	234	16	635	184
Tameside	48	48	48	55	55	55	60	60	60
Trafford	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wigan	198	276	237	204	232	218	220	226	223
Barnsley	163	163	163	171	171	171	161	161	161
Doncaster	62	409	171	69	494	181	65	464	173
Rotherham	130	260	190	129	273	185	135	270	187
Sheffield	84	350	199	31	355	188	100	334	206
Bradford	67	281	165	74	308	179	52	310	180
Calderdale	75	173	117	98	181	129	94	187	130
Kirklees	91	326	172	103	330	172	97	300	160
Leeds	16	281	115	15	276	121	6	307	119
Wakefield	95	245	174	93	245	175	82	255	176

Size of sixth forms in maintained secondary schools in each LEA in England 1992–1994 Position in January each year

	1992			1993			1994		
	Smallest	*Largest*	*Average*	*Smallest*	*Largest*	*Average*	*Smallest*	*Largest*	*Average*
Gateshead	37	228	117	51	257	143	37	236	135
Newcastle upon Tyne	39	283	131	41	284	131	25	257	124
North Tyneside	82	266	141	64	271	139	58	295	139
South Tyneside	163	163	163	179	179	179	196	196	196
Sunderland	156	244	211	192	276	238	178	301	235
Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Avon	36	388	137	32	439	129	37	434	140
Bedfordshire	63	359	198	54	397	201	43	412	204
Berkshire	29	597	151	29	647	153	29	645	150
Buckinghamshire	134	334	209	107	343	207	10	342	168
Cambridgeshire	55	290	172	50	336	183	34	345	176
Cheshire	52	331	140	49	366	144	42	329	139
Cleveland	159	191	178	145	194	174	155	205	183
Cornwall	72	486	186	70	549	195	64	273	166
Cumbria	28	294	121	31	323	122	21	327	119
Derbyshire	40	384	193	84	363	202	82	340	194
Devon	52	371	162	96	435	179	105	441	179
Dorset	68	451	212	68	439	231	62	432	235
Durham	56	437	133	51	532	141	31	577	135
East Sussex	97	312	159	105	305	161	111	299	162
Essex	35	259	144	7	295	145	50	274	154
Gloucestershire	31	412	153	29	451	163	24	450	162
Hampshire	86	253	155	93	252	158	86	230	143
Hereford and Worcester	25	261	131	21	248	139	21	260	140
Hertfordshire	22	248	122	37	259	126	42	266	127
Humberside	45	254	128	39	286	135	42	323	135
Isle of Wight	166	279	220	145	285	220	148	265	219
Kent	56	288	165	37	286	160	53	261	143
Lancashire	59	281	161	52	256	161	15	255	163
Leicestershire	61	614	254	56	501	250	48	557	251
Lincolnshire	51	278	157	48	301	169	56	261	153
Norfolk	79	601	224	37	660	223	76	748	212
North Yorkshire	51	400	172	51	378	174	59	390	167
Northamptonshire	47	244	124	17	269	132	38	280	137
Northumberland	77	340	189	92	337	199	103	330	198
Nottinghamshire	13	225	106	32	251	111	42	246	113
Oxfordshire	56	304	147	58	352	150	41	366	154
Shropshire	61	178	124	72	186	132	67	200	130
Somerset	118	259	187	94	330	192	114	315	185
Staffordshire	37	247	111	46	244	119	40	263	114
Suffolk	94	486	206	95	472	204	86	581	213
Surrey	75	350	177	76	345	177	54	351	174
Warwickshire	77	266	153	85	271	161	79	296	149
West Sussex	72	314	186	67	320	193	57	307	190
Wiltshire	96	264	155	80	246	161	79	263	164
England	2	614	144	4	660	150	6	748	150

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each local authority area in England and Wales the number of sixth forms in local education authorities and grant-maintained schools which had *(a)* under 100 students, *(b)* between 100 and 150 students, *(c)* between 151 and 200 students and *(d)* over 201 students for each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Boswell: Information on the number of maintained secondary schools in each local education authority in England, with sixth forms in the size bands requested for the years requested is shown in table. Information on schools in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms by size position in January each year

	1992				1993				1994			
	Number of pupils in sixth form				*Number of pupils in sixth form*				*Number of pupils in sixth form*			
	Less than 100	*100 to 150*	*151 to 200*	*Over 200*	*Less than 100*	*100 to 150*	*151 to 200*	*Over 200*	*Less than 100*	*100 to 150*	*151 to 200*	*Over 200*
Corporation of London	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Camden	2	3	2	4	1	3	3	4	1	3	2	5
Greenwich	8	4	2	1	6	3	1	2	5	3	2	2
Hackney	9	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0

Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms by size position in January each year

	1992				1993				1994			
	Number of pupils in sixth form				Number of pupils in sixth form				Number of pupils in sixth form			
	Less than 100	100 to 150	151 to 200	Over 200	Less than 100	100 to 150	151 to 200	Over 200	Less than 100	100 to 150	151 to 200	Over 200
Hammersmith	7	0	0	1	7	0	0	1	7	0	0	1
Islington	2	4	2	1	3	1	0	0	3	0	1	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
Lambeth	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
Lewisham	9	4	0	1	8	2	0	1	6	2	2	0
Southwark	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Tower Hamlets	5	1	0	1	4	1	1	1	2	3	1	1
Wandsworth	3	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	2
Westminster	1	3	2	1	1	2	3	1	1	3	2	1
Barking	4	2	2	0	4	1	3	0	4	1	2	1
Barnet	1	6	6	3	3	4	5	4	0	7	7	2
Bexley	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	0
Brent	7	1	4	2	6	2	1	5	5	2	1	5
Bromley	2	6	6	1	3	6	4	2	2	8	3	2
Croydon	0	1	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	2	0
Ealing	4	3	4	2	6	1	3	2	0	2	2	3
Enfield	4	6	4	1	2	4	7	2	3	7	4	1
Haringey	5	2	1	1	3	5	0	1	3	4	1	1
Harrow	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Havering	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	2
Hillingdon	9	2	5	1	5	4	5	1	7	1	5	2
Hounslow	2	8	3	1	1	8	4	1	2	8	3	1
Kingston upon Thames	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Merton	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2
Newham	9	4	0	0	3	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Redbridge	1	3	6	2	0	2	4	6	0	3	3	6
Richmond upon Thames	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sutton	0	2	2	0	0	1	3	0	2	3	2	0
Waltham Forest	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Birmingham	11	9	8	1	7	11	8	4	10	8	10	3
Coventry	5	10	3	1	6	7	4	2	9	5	2	3
Dudley	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Sandwell	4	3	1	0	4	1	3	0	4	1	3	0
Solihull	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Walsall	11	7	0	1	9	6	3	1	10	6	2	1
Wolverhampton	11	1	3	1	10	3	1	2	11	3	1	2
Knowsley	3	0	2	0	3	1	0	1	3	1	1	0
Liverpool	14	13	7	1	13	14	7	1	16	12	6	1
St. Helens	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	3	1	2	1	2
Sefton	4	3	4	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Wirral	1	3	3	0	1	2	3	1	1	3	2	1
Bolton	1	1	0	3	1	1	0	3	1	1	0	3
Bury	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Manchester	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	1
Oldham	12	2	1	0	7	1	2	0	1	2	2	0
Rochdale	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1
Salford	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Stockport	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	3	0	0	1
Tameside	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Trafford	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wigan	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Barnsley	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Doncaster	2	4	3	5	2	3	5	4	3	5	2	4
Rotherham	0	2	3	3	0	2	4	2	0	2	4	2
Sheffield	1	3	1	3	2	2	0	4	0	3	1	3
Bradford	4	6	7	7	4	4	5	11	3	7	5	9
Calderdale	3	6	1	0	2	5	3	0	2	6	2	0
Kirklees	1	3	3	2	0	4	3	2	2	2	3	2
Leeds	17	10	8	6	15	9	10	5	18	8	9	5
Wakefield	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	3
Gateshead	6	1	2	1	3	2	1	3	2	3	3	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	5	2	5	1	6	2	4	1	5	3	3	2
North Tyneside	3	2	2	1	2	4	1	1	2	3	1	1
South Tyneside	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Sunderland	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2

Number of maintained secondary schools with sixth forms by size position in January each year

	1992				1993				1994			
	Number of pupils in sixth form				Number of pupils in sixth form				Number of pupils in sixth form			
	Less than 100	100 to 150	151 to 200	Over 200	Less than 100	100 to 150	151 to 200	Over 200	Less than 100	100 to 150	151 to 200	Over 200
Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Avon	17	10	9	7	21	12	8	8	15	14	10	6
Bedfordshire	2	2	7	8	1	3	7	8	1	3	7	8
Berkshire	10	11	8	6	8	13	6	8	10	10	8	7
Buckinghamshire	0	3	1	4	0	2	2	5	4	3	1	5
Cambridgeshire	3	1	11	5	2	1	11	6	2	3	11	5
Cheshire	13	19	7	8	11	22	7	7	16	18	4	9
Cleveland	0	0	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	1
Cornwall	1	4	6	3	2	2	5	5	2	2	6	3
Cumbria	11	9	5	2	11	10	4	2	12	8	5	2
Derbyshire	2	5	9	9	1	7	8	9	1	9	4	11
Devon	7	6	8	7	1	13	6	8	0	13	8	7
Dorset	1	4	4	6	1	4	2	8	1	3	3	7
Durham	9	6	2	3	8	7	2	3	8	7	2	3
East Sussex	1	8	4	3	0	9	4	3	0	9	4	3
Essex	9	18	9	8	11	13	10	10	8	12	10	10
Gloucestershire	7	3	4	5	4	6	4	5	4	7	2	6
Hampshire	1	4	1	2	1	4	0	3	2	3	1	2
Hereford and Worcester	6	13	6	3	6	10	8	3	7	12	4	5
Hertfordshire	30	25	19	5	29	27	16	7	32	19	18	10
Humberside	8	9	6	3	5	11	8	2	6	11	7	2
Isle of Wight	0	0	2	3	0	1	1	3	0	1	1	3
Kent	3	6	5	5	3	3	8	4	8	3	7	4
Lancashire	2	6	2	6	1	7	2	6	3	6	2	6
Leicestershire	3	3	4	14	2	4	6	12	3	4	4	13
Lincolnshire	2	4	1	3	1	6	0	3	2	3	4	2
Norfolk	1	3	4	11	2	3	3	12	3	5	5	9
North Yorkshire	3	9	6	5	2	10	3	8	5	8	3	6
Northamptonshire	16	12	6	5	13	12	8	6	14	11	6	7
Northumberland	1	5	4	6	1	4	4	7	0	6	4	6
Nottinghamshire	22	27	2	3	21	24	7	2	21	23	8	1
Oxfordshire	4	15	2	6	4	14	5	4	7	11	3	6
Shropshire	2	6	1	0	2	4	3	0	2	5	2	0
Somerset	0	1	5	2	1	1	4	2	0	2	3	3
Staffordshire	27	9	8	5	23	14	7	5	23	15	8	3
Suffolk	1	6	8	10	1	7	6	11	1	7	5	12
Surrey	3	9	6	9	5	7	7	8	6	6	7	8
Warwickshire	4	4	0	4	4	2	2	4	3	4	2	2
West Sussex	3	4	6	8	2	5	5	9	3	3	4	11
Wiltshire	3	6	4	4	1	7	4	5	1	8	4	4
England	467	464	342	283	391	468	339	325	415	463	322	318

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils aged *(a)* seven, *(b)* eight, *(c)* nine and *(d)* 10 years attend schools in each of the local authority area in England and Wales.

Mr. Forth: The number of pupils in each local education authority area in England in January 1994 who were aged seven, eight, nine and 10 years at the beginning of the school years are shown in the table. Information on pupils by age in schools in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Pupils aged 7–10 years of age[1] in schools in each local education authority in England January 1994

Local education authority	Pupils by age			
	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years
Corporation of London	71	76	75	91
Camden	1,907	1,921	1,850	1,836
Greenwich	2,880	2,859	2,728	2,742
Hackney	2,427	2,468	2,365	2,283
Hammersmith	1,350	1,336	1,294	1,260
Islington	2,078	1,995	1,966	1,803
Kensington and Chelsea	1,815	1,652	1,574	1,466
Lambeth	2,694	2,720	2,492	2,419
Lewisham	2,877	2,848	2,577	2,668
Southwark	3,131	2,970	2,764	2,842
Tower Hamlets	2,836	2,815	2,727	2,564
Wandsworth	2,548	2,510	2,269	2,232
Westminster	1,584	1,545	1,457	1,488
Barking	1,947	1,988	1,921	1,928
Barnet	3,442	3,432	3,256	3,299
Bexley	2,793	2,824	2,557	2,572
Brent	3,155	3,024	2,961	2,865
Bromley	3,520	3,409	3,226	3,321
Croydon	4,041	4,002	3,766	3,887

Pupils aged 7–10 years of age[1] in schools in each local education authority in England
January 1994

Local education authority	Pupils by age			
	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years
Ealing	3,573	3,507	3,481	3,486
Enfield	3,234	3,275	3,091	3,064
Haringey	2,677	2,588	2,468	2,411
Harrow	2,542	2,535	2,483	2,438
Havering	2,815	2,886	2,729	2,704
Hillingdon	3,023	3,034	2,798	2,841
Hounslow	2,503	2,542	2,317	2,302
Kingston upon Thames	1,663	1,608	1,531	1,551
Merton	1,990	1,928	1,922	1,914
Newham	3,458	3,460	3,401	3,237
Redbridge	2,971	2,990	3,055	2,906
Richmond upon Thames	1,943	1,953	1,754	1,816
Sutton	1,939	2,029	1,855	1,876
Waltham Forest	2,784	2,711	2,656	2,569
Birmingham	14,808	14,791	14,195	14,254
Coventry	4,191	4,123	3,953	3,812
Dudley	4,005	3,893	3,651	3,708
Sandwell	4,040	4,007	3,777	3,830
Solihull	2,761	2,766	2,572	2,609
Walsall	3,636	3,717	3,440	3,578
Wolverhampton	3,328	3,286	3,158	3,184
Knowsley	2,355	2,385	2,197	2,305
Liverpool	6,835	6,892	6,515	6,379
St. Helens	2,435	2,328	2,250	2,332
Sefton	3,792	3,797	3,723	3,794
Wirral	4,499	4,611	4,253	4,435
Bolton	3,721	3,726	3,569	3,603
Bury	2,343	2,386	2,240	2,190
Manchester	6,397	6,186	5,946	5,814
Oldham	3,359	3,304	3,204	3,138
Rochdale	2,975	2,977	2,822	2,908
Salford	3,132	3,107	2,941	2,940
Stockport	3,821	3,831	3,717	3,723
Tameside	3,038	3,029	2,868	2,848
Trafford	2,891	2,858	2,767	2,775
Wigan	4,069	4,091	3,897	3,918
Barnsley	2,819	2,745	2,749	2,694
Doncaster	4,123	4,041	3,871	3,923
Rotherham	3,390	3,401	3,166	3,343
Sheffield	6,228	5,875	5,812	5,585
Bradford	7,096	7,150	7,016	6,924
Calderdale	2,556	2,676	2,527	2,451
Kirklees	5,061	5,059	5,028	4,879
Leeds	9,254	8,778	8,542	8,646
Wakefield	4,296	4,241	4,021	4,016
Gateshead	2,529	2,477	2,445	2,346
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,483	3,393	3,241	3,329
North Tyneside	2,452	2,536	2,342	2,406
South Tyneside	2,218	2,110	1,893	1,865
Sunderland	4,091	4,159	3,898	4,055
Isles of Scilly	31	23	18	33
Avon	11,730	11,592	11,224	11,062
Bedfordshire	7,584	7,449	7,137	7,227
Berkshire	10,034	9,785	9,581	9,499
Buckinghamshire	8,503	8,754	8,230	8,303
Cambridgeshire	8,482	8,647	8,170	8,303
Cheshire	12,797	12,788	12,265	12,330
Cleveland	8,187	8,303	8,120	7,889
Cornwall	5,647	5,814	5,566	5,613
Cumbria	5,861	5,979	5,895	5,889
Derbyshire	11,699	11,698	11,259	11,388
Devon	12,435	11,923	11,958	11,936
Dorset	7,315	7,467	7,065	7,046
Durham	7,570	7,724	7,405	7,468
East Sussex	7,640	7,968	7,577	7,780
Essex	19,421	19,012	18,714	18,400
Gloucestershire	6,630	6,698	6,439	6,447
Hampshire	19,864	19,950	18,852	19,299
Hereford and Worcester	8,520	8,446	8,421	8,623
Hertfordshire	12,865	12,391	12,318	12,326
Humberside	11,767	11,725	11,260	11,039
Isle of Wight	1,432	1,441	1,495	1,430
Kent	19,605	19,334	18,839	18,775
Lancashire	18,717	18,537	18,226	18,014
Leicestershire	11,833	11,848	11,575	11,488
Lincolnshire	7,166	7,287	7,119	7,175
Norfolk	8,742	8,567	8,396	8,411
North Yorkshire	8,327	8,544	8,313	8,423
Northamptonshire	8,009	7,956	7,713	7,637
Northumberland	3,847	3,942	3,723	3,803
Nottinghamshire	13,036	12,895	12,288	12,509
Oxfordshire	7,026	6,884	6,728	6,847
Shropshire	5,393	5,480	5,251	5,403
Somerset	5,743	5,726	5,671	5,729
Staffordshire	13,367	13,518	13,063	13,401
Suffolk	7,668	7,775	7,622	7,482
Surrey	12,074	12,135	11,657	11,688
Warwickshire	6,211	6,129	5,966	5,991
West Sussex	8,238	8,001	8,101	8,184
Wiltshire	7,469	7,421	7,048	7,087
England	614,723	611,778	589,840	590,597

[1] Ages as at 31 August 1993.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the absenteeism rate for her Department in each year since 1991;

(2) what was the absenteeism rate for the Teachers Pensions Agency in each year since 1991.

Mr. Forth: The staff of the Teachers Pensions Agency are employed by the Department of Education and TPA absence rates are not collected separately.

The average number of working days lost due to sickness by DFE staff over the last three years is as follows:

1991	*1992*	*1993*
8.9 (days per staff year)	10	9.8

Nursery Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children under the age of five years were attending on a *(a)* full-time basis and *(b)* part-time basis (i) nursery classes, (ii) nursery schools or (iii) reception classes in primary schools on the latest date for which information is available

Mr. Forth: The number of full-time pupils under five being taught in maintained nursery and primary schools in England in January 1994 is shown in table.

	Full-time	*Part-time*
Nursery Schools	8,930	43,332
Primary Schools		
Nursery Classes	27,292	267,039
Infant Classes	299,155	28,848

Student Loans Company Ltd.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she expects to receive the report of Coopers and Lybrand into alleged corruption within the Student Loans Company Ltd.; and if she will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received the provisional conclusions of Coopers and Lybrand's investigation into allegations of impropriety at the Student Loans Company. The investigation is nearing completion. Its full conclusions will be reported to the Committee of Public Accounts in the normal way.

Grant-Maintained Schools (Condition Survey)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which company won the contract for undertaking the forthcoming condition survey of grant-maintained schools; what is the price of the contract; and what criteria for standards of work on the survey were employed in assessing the tenders.

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member.

ENVIRONMENT

Dioxins and Furans

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the contribution of municipal waste incineration to the presence of dioxins and furans in the environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: So long as municipal waste incineration used older technologies and standards, it was a significant source of dioxins and furans. The Royal Commission on environmental pollution, in its 17th report "Incineration of Waste", Cm 2181, concurred with pollution paper 27, "Dioxins in the Environment", in estimating that in the 1970s and 1980s domestic waste incineration may have been contributing one fifth of the man made releases of dioxins and furans to the United Kingdom environment. In 1991, we introduced far stricter emission standards on incineration. This led the royal commission to conclude that the proportion of the dioxin and furan load attributable to municipal waste incineration would undergo substantial percentage reductions. The royal commission has recently confirmed its view that incinerators which meet present-day emission standards are environmentally acceptable. Further work is being done to assess the origins, scale and impacts of dioxin emissions; but the royal commission's conclusion should remain unaffected.

National Waste Strategy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce details of the national waste strategy.

Mr. Atkins: We are aiming to issue a draft waste strategy for England and Wales for consultation later this month and to publish the final version of the strategy in the summer.

Business Rates

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the average business ratepayer paid in 1979, 1983, 1987, 1992 and in the latest available year in *(a)* actual and *(b)* real terms.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Average business rates per ratepayer prior to April 1990 cannot be compared with figures for later years. The following table gives the available information:

	Non-domestic rate yield England		*Number of hereditaments at start of year*[1] *millions*	*Non-domestic rate yield per hereditament*	
	£ million	*£ million 1993–94 prices*		*£*	*£ 1993–94 prices*
1979–80	3,354	8,235	3.52	953	2,339
1983–84	6,042	10,198	3.57	1,692	2,857
1987–88	8,188	11,498	3.65	2,243	3,150
1992–93[2]	11,479	11,830	1.64	6,999	7,213
1994–95[2]	10,664	10,455	1.64	6,502	6,375

Notes:

[1] There were a number of changes to the definition of a non-domestic hereditament on 1 April 1990, when the uniform business rate was introduced; in particular, domestic garages outside the curtilage of the dwelling ceased to be treated as non-domestic properties. Figures for years prior to April 1990 are not therefore comparable with later years.

[2] Figure for yield are based on the estimated gross contribution to the non-domestic rates pool for 1992–93 and 1994–95 i.e before the allowance for the cost of collection and the City of London offset are netted off. They include an allowance for adjustments to the yield in respect of prior years, as a result of successful appeals decided in the year, and other changes in rateable values. The estimates do not include amounts contributed by central Government to compensate the non-domestic rates pool for loss of income resulting from changes to the transitional arrangements, as announced in recent budgets.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of projects approved under the single regeneration budget and the last five years' operation of the urban programme were for *(a)* economic, *(b)* social and *(c)* community projects.

Mr. Curry: Partnership bids approved under the first single regeneration budget bidding round, address a wide range of local needs and priorities, reflecting the objectives set out in paragraph 10 of the published bidding guidance, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Information is not held in the form requested; but I sent details of all the successful bids to the hon. Member on 5 December.

For the urban programme, the proportion of projects by category is as follows:

Year	Economic Per cent.	Environmental Per cent.	Social Per cent.	Housing Per cent.
1990–91	29	17	46	8
1991–92	33	23	44	—
1992–93	26	24	50	—
1993–94	33	27	40	—
1994–95 (provisional)	34	22	44	—

Notes:
"Housing" ceased to be a separate category in 1990–91; from 1991–92 most "housing" activity was recorded under "environmental".
Most "community" projects would have been classified as "social" and could be disaggregated only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra resources are available in the single regeneration budget following the ending of targeted programmes.

Mr. Curry: Targeted programmes have not ended. All existing commitments under the 20 programmes which now form part of the single regeneration budget continue to be honoured.

Following the first bidding round, £125 million is available for new SRB projects in 1995–96 and £225 million in both 1996–97 and 1997–98. A second bidding round, to be launched later this year, will build up to expenditure of £200 million in 1997–98, with £40 million available in 1996–97 for early funding of approved projects.

Total SRB expenditure over the next three years on current plans will be almost £4 billion, of which over £800 million will be available for new projects. The balance of resources—over £1 billion a year—will fund the commitments on existing programmes.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received suggesting that planning legislation should be amended to enable local authorities to require planning permission for houses in multiple occupation shared by six or fewer adults not of the same family; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: Few representations have been made for greater planning controls in this area. The present arrangements reflect that, in land use terms, the amenity of a neighbourhood is not much altered whether a house is occupied by a large family or by six unrelated adults living as a single household.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the amount of Government grant to each of the county councils in the seven-county south-west region, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Kent, per head of population, for each of the financial years 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994-95; and what is his estimate for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available information is shown in the tables below. Figures for revenue support grant per head of population are not comparable between years, because RSG is paid to compensate authorities for the difference between their standard spending assessment and the sum of redistributed non-domestic rates and council tax for standard spending. Note that for the community charge years—1991–92 and 1992–93—there are no figures for RSG to the counties because RSG was paid into the collection fund of the districts under the community charge system.

RSG per head of population

	1993–94 £	1994–95 £	1995–96 £ Settlement[1]
Avon	217	239	217
Cornwall	235	266	258
Devon	214	241	234
Dorset	172	196	189
Gloucestershire	206	225	215
Somerset	207	233	212
Wiltshire	202	224	201
Oxfordshire	181	212	195
Hampshire	212	239	214
Kent	268	302	282

Notes:
[1] 1995–96 provisional settlement figures

Special and Specific Grants in AEF per head of population[1]

	1991–92 £ Outturn	1992–93 £ Outturn	1993–94 £ Outturn	1994–94 £ Outturn
Avon	54	60	74	76
Cornwall	53	58	75	75
Devon	56	63	81	79
Dorset	54	58	70	77
Gloucestershire	59	64	77	81
Somerset	58	64	80	83
Wiltshire	59	61	73	77
Oxfordshire	54	59	67	74
Hampshire	51	57	67	71
Kent	56	61	75	78

Note:
[1] Special and specific grants information for 1995–96 is not yet available.

Mr. Barry Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on his proposed notional amounts and adjustments to the capping criteria in 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We have received a large number of representations from authorities, including new information and revised data, which we are considering carefully. However, we have now reached preliminary views on all these representations, and we are informing authorities of our current proposals reflecting these preliminary conclusions. I am arranging for tables

showing our current proposals to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Heppel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much the levels of *(a)* local government expenditure and *(b)* total public expenditure have changed over the last five years in (i) actual and (ii) real terms.

Mr. Aitken: I have been asked to reply

The information requested is given in the table.

	Changes between 1988–89 and 1993–94 per cent.	
	Actual	*Real*
General Government expenditure excluding privatisation proceeds:	+51	+15
of which local authorities:	+47	+12

There were some major changes in responsibility between 1988–89 and 1993–94. The main ones are the transfer of responsibility for sixth form colleges–higher education colleges from local authorities to central Government and the transfer of responsibility for community care from central Government to local authorities. If the local authority figures are adjusted to take account of these, the actual change would be 54 per cent. and the real change would be 17 per cent. for local authorities. Grant-maintained schools have been included as part of local authority spending.

Council Houses

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses were completed by northern councils in each year since 1988; and what are the estimated totals for the next five years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates of the total numbers of housebuilding completions for each local authority area in the northern region of England are shown in the publication "Local Housing Statistics". Figures are shown for the years indicated in table 1 of the following issues:

Year	*Issue number*	*Table numbers*
1988–90	103	1(d), 1(e) and 1(f)
1991	105	1(b)
1992	109	1(b)
1993–94[1]	110	1(b) and 1(a)[1]

[1] first quarter of 1994 only.

Estimates for the region as a whole are shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics". Figures for 1988 to 1993 are in table 6.4(b) of the latest annual edition. Figures for the first nine months of 1994 are in table 1.3 of the quarterly edition, part 1, for the September quarter 1994. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

The Department does not forecast the number of new dwellings to be built by local authorities.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will remove the disparity of environmental standards imposing on clinical waste incinerators of differing sizes via his guidance notes PG5/1 and regulations IPR5/2.

Sir Paul Beresford: The different standards were set because of the different size and pollution potential of the incinerators coming under these two guidance notes. PG5/1 is currently under review and consideration is being given to raising the standards having regard to those in IPR5/2 concerning air pollution control. Most, if not all, clinical waste incinerators are likely to be subject to the EC hazardous waste incineration directive which was adopted last month.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue directives enforcing agencies to ensure that the deadline of 1 October set out in his guidance notes PG5/1 relating to clinical waste incinerators is enforced in a rigorous and timely manner.

Sir Paul Beresford: Local authorities are required by section 7(11) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State, which specifies a compliance deadline of 1 October 1995. There is no reason to believe that this guidance will not be followed. Failure to comply with an authorisation condition which requires higher air pollution standards after this date would be an offence and would render an incinerator operator liable to fines of up to £20,000 on summary conviction, and an unlimited fine and up to two years' imprisonment on conviction on indictment.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has given to local authorities on the role to be played by domestic waste incineration in waste disposal strategies.

Mr. Atkins: The Department is currently preparing a waste strategy for England and Wales. This will aim to provide a coherent framework for waste management policies throughout the country and will consider the use of domestic waste incineration and the role of local authorities in waste management. We are aiming to issue a draft for consultation later this month and to publish the final version of the strategy in the summer.

Absenteeism

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the absenteeism rate for Ordnance Survey in each year since 1991.

Sir Paul Beresford: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to Ordnance Survey under its chief executive, Professor Rhind. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Rhind to Mr. David Chidgey, dated 16 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for the Environment has asked me to reply to your Question about rates of absenteeism in Ordnance Survey.

The information you requested is contained in the table below. It has been supplied by the Occupational Health Service who have confirmed that similar information for 1994 is not yet available.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*
Average number of working days sick absence per head of staff	8.6	8.9	9.0
Percentage of working days lost due to sick absence	3.8	3.9	4.0

Please let me know if you require any additional information or clarification.

Orimulsion

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to require the introduction of gasification processes in any power plant licensed to burn orimulsion; what studies his Department has made of the environmental impact of the use of orimulsion to generate power; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: In line with their statutory obligations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will include in the authorisation for any individual plant such conditions as are needed to meet the objective of ensuring that the operator will use the best available techniques not entailing excessive cost for that plant to prevent or, where that is not practicable, to reduce to a minimum and to render harmless releases of prescribed substances, having regard to the best practicable environmental option for the environment as a whole.

Various studies on orimulsion have been conducted for the Department and for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution. These have addressed such issues as: SO_2 emissions from orimulsion compared with heavy fuel oil or UK coal; emissions of particulates, vanadium and nickel and the production of acid smuts from the combustion of orimulsion; and the effects of spillage of orimulsion.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many inspectors were employed by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on 31 March of each year since 1990; and how many were engaged in work concerned with *(a)* waste disposal and *(b)* disposal of radioactive substances.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:

Number of inspectors in post as at:	
31 March 1990	105
31 March 1991	115
31 March 1992	148
31 March 1993	170
31 March 1994	188

Under HMIP's integrated structure, work on waste disposal and disposal of radioactive substances is undertaken by staff working in multi-disciplinary teams where individuals address all aspects of the inspectorate's responsibilities for pollution regulation and control.

Radioactive Waste

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken in respect of the owner of the field at Poplar farm, Chelveston, Northamptonshire, in which drums of uranium 238 filings were found in mid-January.

Mr. Atkins: The legislation under which radioactive waste is controlled is the Radioactive Substance Act 1993. The question of possible enforcement action under this Act is a matter for the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. At this time, the matters are under investigation and any actions taken will depend on the outcome of these investigations.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received a report from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on the source of the drums of uranium 238 filings found recently at Poplar farm, Chelveston, Northamptonshire; if the carrier who took the drums from the point of production has been identified; whether the carrier was a registered carrier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The scrap metal containing uranium found on land at Poplar farm, Caldecott, Northamptonshire is of unknown origin. Investigations are continuing to try and trace the source of the material and those involved in its movement.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the nature of the uranium recently discovered in Northampton; what action has been taken to protect the interests of local people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The scrap metal containing uranium found on land at Poplar farm, Caldecott, Northamptonshire consists of metal turnings commonly called swarf. It is believed to contain depleted uranium.

When this was discovered, HMIP informed the local police force and other relevant bodies. The local standing emergency plan was put into force. HMIP arranged for the scrap metal to be removed from the site; any remaining contamination will be removed shortly. Operations were managed so that the risk to the public was minimal. A 24-hour police presence was arranged to restrict access to the site by unauthorised persons. The United States air force authorities were consulted about the accommodation they use opposite the site.

A local health telephone help line was put in place so that residents or other members of the public could seek advice or monitoring.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations control the disposal of uranium by civil bodies; what consideration has been given to bringing these into line with regulations concerning disposal of uranium from military sources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Disposal of radioactive waste is subject to regulation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. Premises occupied by armed forces are exempt from the terms of the Act, although under arrangements agreed with the Ministry of Defence, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate control disposal from military sites as if the Act applied to those premises. The arrangements are kept under review.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what volume of *(a)* low-level, *(b)* medium-level and *(c)* high-level radioactive waste was produced in England and Wales in each year since 1990;

(2) what volume of *(a)* low-level, *(b)* medium-level and *(c)* high-level radioactive waste is expected to be produced in England and Wales in each year from 1995 to 2000.

Mr. Atkins: Information about radioactive waste produced in the UK can be found in the "The United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory 1991", a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. A 1994 edition of the inventory is currently in preparation.

Sustainable Development

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the first meeting of the United Kingdom round table on sustainable development is to be held; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The inaugural meeting of the round table will be held on Monday 23 January. Professor Sir Richard Southwood and I will be co-chairmen.

This is a major new body with a vital role in driving forward environmentally sustainable development. It will have the following objectives:

to help identify the agenda and priorities for sustainable development;

to develop new areas of consensus on difficult issues of sustainable development and where this is not possible, to clarify and reduce difference;

to provide advice and recommendations on actions to achieve sustainable development;

to help evaluate progress towards objectives; and

to inform and involve others, building wider support for emerging consensus.

A copy of my letter of invitation to members has been placed in the House Library. A list of members will be placed in the Library shortly.

Site Rebate Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the cost of the site rebate scheme in 1966 and the cost of the council tax rebate in the current year.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities in England and Wales were paid £22,350,000 in rating relief in 1966–67. The cost of council tax benefit is currently estimated to be £2,011 million for 1994–95.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Lang: Information about the respective roles and responsibilities of the Secretary of State and the agency chief executive is set out in the framework document for each individual executive agency. Copies of framework documents for all eight of my executive agencies were placed in the Library of the House when each agency was launched or following a triennial review of the agency, where this has taken place.

Asylum Seekers

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1994 to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) *Official Report*, columns *691-92*, if his intention not to change how refugees are treated with regard to charges for further education extends to those seeking asylum.

Mr. Lang: As I explained in my answer to the right hon. Member on 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *350*, the position of those seeking asylum is currently part of the consultations to which I referred in that answer.

Flooding

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra finance he is making available to the local authorities who have been affected by the recent floodings in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The extra financial assistance from the Government to the local authorities affected by last month's severe flooding in Strathclyde takes a variety of forms.

First, the Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance to local authorities has been activated as regards the whole of Strathclyde region. It is therefore open to all authorities within Strathclyde to submit claims for grant under the scheme. No formal claims have yet been received, as again the local authorities are still assessing their costs. Authorities have until 31 May 1995 to submit their claims. It is therefore too early to estimate what the final amounts of any Bellwin grant payable as a result of the flooding might be.

Secondly, a supplementary housing capital allocation of £100,000 was made to Renfrew district council in respect of the cost of re-housing persons made homeless by the flooding and carrying out repairs to council housing stock. I also announced that a further £150,000 was being made available to meet further capital housing requirements in the current financial year for any of the district councils in the affected area: as yet no request has been received for any part of these additional resources.

Thirdly, supplementary non-housing capital allocations totalling £1.365 million was made to Strathclyde regional council for 1994–95. These related to a variety of services, primarily roads and transport and water and sewerage, and met in full the request for additional capital resources made by the regional council. We have advised the district councils affected that we will consider sympathetically, so far as available resources allow, any requests from them for additional non-housing capital allocations for the current financial year. So far no such requests have been received.

Finally, we have made it clear to the local authorities concerned that we will take into account when setting both housing and non-housing capital allocations for 1995–96 any reasonable requests from them for additional resources arising from the flooding. Again no such requests have yet been received, as I understand that the authorities concerned are still assessing the costs to them of the flooding.

We continue to be in close touch with the local authorities and will respond to any requests from them as quickly as possible.

Shipbuilding

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the size of the shipbuilding industry in Scotland in 1979; and what its size is now.

Mr. Stewart: In 1979, the shipbuilding industry in Scotland employed about 18,800 people in 12 shipyards, excluding ship repair and boat building yards. In 1994, the industry employed 5,200 people in five shipyards, again excluding ship repair and boat building.

Training in Scotland

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the allocation of the budgets for Training in Scotland from 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Stewart: In 1994–95, a total of £210.063 million was allocated to Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to fund their respective training programmes. The planning figure for 1995–96, which includes provision for the package of training measures announced last year in the White Paper on Competitiveness, is £212.213 million: this figure is subject to parliamentary approval of the estimates. A breakdown of the allocations is as follows:

£ millions

	1994–95		*1995–96 (plans)*	
	Scottish Enterprise	*Highlands and Islands Enterprise*	*Scottish Enterprise*	*Highlands and Islands Enterprise*
Youth training	87.0	6.451	91.386	6.731
Adult training/training for work	88.431	5.302	79.328	4.925
Enterprise training/training and education support	21.183	1.696	27.740	2.103

Councillors' Allowances

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the outcome of the recent consultation exercise on councillors' allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: A total of around 50 responses were received to the consultation paper. In the light of these comments, my right hon. Friend has decided to bring forward amending regulations which will apply to the shadow and islands councils from April 1995 onwards. The new system will recognise the workload that councillors will have to undertake after reorganisation and will allow local authorities greater flexibility. The draft regulations will:

provide a Scottish quantum of around £7 million for the payment of basic allowance to all councillors; this may include a discretionary attendance allowance scheme of up to 25 per cent. of each council's share of the quantum;

require the Scottish quantum to be distributed on the basis of population within each of the new council areas in three bandwidths. Details of the three bandwidths and the amount each authority will use to calculate its share of the quantum for basic/attendance allowance are given below. The sum available for each council is calculated by multiplying the figures given by the number of councillors.

leave decisions on the payment of special responsibility allowance at the discretion of councils themselves, who will have to balance their priorities and needs in determining payments. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has indicated its willingness to issue guidance on the level of special responsibility allowances which might be paid;

require that where special responsibility allowance is paid councils will, as at present, pay the allowance to at least one member of an opposition group.

require councils to publish details of their allowances scheme and to publish an annual report of payments made to individual councillors.

My right hon. Friend will consult local authority interests on the draft regulations with the intention that the new system will be in place for the shadow and islands councils in April 1995. The present arrangements for the payment of councillors' allowances will remain in place for the existing mainland councils until the new councils take over in April 1996.

	Basic/attendance allowance
Population over 150,000	
City of Aberdeen	6,000
Aberdeenshire	6,000
City of Dundee	6,000
City of Edinburgh	6,000
Fife	6,000
City of Glasgow	6,000
Highland	6,000
North Lanarkshire	6,000
South Lanarkshire	6,000
Renfrewshire	6,000
Population 100,000—150,000	
Angus	5,500
East Ayrshire	5,500
North Ayrshire	5,500
South Ayrshire	5,500
The Borders	5,500
Dumfries and Galloway	5,500
East Dunbartonshire	5,500
Falkirk	5,500
West Lothian	5,500
Perth and Kinross	5,500
Population up to 100,000	
Argyll and Bute	5,000
Clackmannan	5,000
Dumbarton and Clydebank	5,000
Inverclyde	5,000
East Lothian	5,000
Midlothian	5,000
Moray	5,000
Orkney Islands Council	5,000
East Renfrewshire	5,000
Shetland Islands Council	5,000
Stirling	5,000
Western Isles Islands Council	5,000

The Secretary of State also proposes to align where practicable the rates of travel and subsistence payable to elected members of local authorities with those paid to local authority officials. A circular to local authorities giving details of the new rates which will be effective from 1 April 1994 will be issued in due course.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been received in management allowances by each general practitioner fundholding practice for each financial year since its establishment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The information requested is not available centrally. The monitoring of individual fundholder's management allowances is the responsibility of individual health boards as part of their role in monitoring the overall performance of fundholders in management of their fund. The allowance has a maximum level—£35,000 for 1994–95 which no practice can exceed.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures are being taken in each health board area in Scotland to promote general practitioner fundholding; how many general practitioner fundholding practices are currently operating within each health board area; and how much it has cost for each health board to promote this policy.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The information requested on current numbers of operational GP fundholding practices is as set out in the table. Each health board is responsible for the promotion of GP fundholding in its area and decides its own measures to promote the scheme. The expenditure incurred is largely indirect costs which are not separately identifiable within overall health board expenditure.

	Number of GP fundholders currently operational
Argyll and Clyde	5
Ayrshire and Arran	4
Borders	2
Dumfries and Galloway	1
Fife	4
Forth Valley	4
Grampian	31
Greater Glasgow	11
Highland	3
Lanarkshire	15
Lothian	18
Orkney	—
Shetland	—
Tayside	9
Western Isles	—
Scotland	107

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the general practitioner fundholders currently operating in Scotland, for each health board area, and the dates when these practices were established.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* According to the latest information provided by health boards there are currently 107 operational fundholders in Scotland. As listing all with dates of establishment would be rather lengthy I shall arrange for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been spent on management allowances for general practitioner fundholders for each health board area during the financial year 1993–94; and how much the Scottish Office estimates will be spent on general practitioner fundholder allowances during the financial year 1994–95.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The information requested is given in the table. GP fundholding has delivered many improvements in quality of care for patients. The costs of the management allowance—at about 2 per cent. of budgets set represents excellent value for money.

The estimated expenditure for 1994–95 is based on health board forecasts. GP practices can be approved for entry to the fundholding scheme at any point during the year and therefore the estimate of expenditure for 1994–95 may underestimate actual expenditure.

Health board	*1993–94 £000*	*1994–95 £000 (estimated)*
Argyll and Clyde	169	175
Ayrshire and Arran	131	140
Borders	54	80
Dumfries and Galloway	32	95
Fife	84	153
Forth Valley	135	169
Grampian	1,006	1,190
Greater Glasgow	275	509
Highland	100	105
Lanarkshire	418	543
Lothian	428	717
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	282	322
Western Isles	—	—
	3,114	4,198

1. The expenditure includes both revenue and capital components.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment the Scottish Office has made of the impact of general practitioner fundholding on patient care.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* The Scottish Office has provided funding for an independent evaluation of the impact of GP fundholding on patient care.

This evaluation is currently being carried out by a team led by Professor John Howie from the department of general practice at Edinburgh university. The final report is due for publication during 1995.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what target has been set by the Scottish Office for the number of general practitioner fundholding practices for each health board area in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has not specifically set a target number of general practitioner fundholding practices for each health board area in Scotland. However, all health boards other than Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles have agreed with the NHS Management Executive an objective of achieving at least 30 per cent. coverage of the population by 1995–96.

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Five members of staff have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993.

All these reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Private Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many in-patient and out-patient private patients were treated in NHS hospitals; and what was the total income earned from private patients in each of the last five years, and by health board area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* The figures in the tables have been taken from health board annual accounts and from 1992–93 a combination of health board and NHS trust annual accounts. The figures for 1993–94 are provisional.

The number of in-patient and out-patient private patients treated in NHS hospitals for the years 1991–92 to 1993–94 is set out in table 1. The figures for 1989–90 and 1990–91 are not available centrally.

The income earned from private patients in each of the last five years by health board area is set out in table 2. The figure for Greater Glasgow in 1993–94 includes overseas patients, and can therefore not be compared directly with those for earlier years.

Table 1

Health board	*1991–92*		*1992–93*		*1993–94*	
	In-patients	*Out-patients*	*In-patients*	*Out-patients*	*In-patients*	*Out-patients*
Argyll and Clyde	259	625	52	704	104	541
Ayr and Arran	1,217	318	410	215	406	194
Borders	182	60	214	119	142	84
Dumfries and Galloway	0	320	0	249	0	271
Fife	20	0	5	8	10	9
Forth Valley	195	174	142	210	163	363
Grampian	1,674	1,644	214	368	169	330
Greater Glasgow	77	29	114	39	85	389
Highland	282	209	230	146	412	196
Lanarkshire	0	24	0	1	0	3
Lothian	749	395	845	485	61	428
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	724	848	733	950	233	471
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5,379	4,646	2,959	3,494	1,785	3,279

Table 2

£000

Health board	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Argyll and Clyde	69	57	49	43	36
Ayr and Arran	144	174	234	142	115
Borders	22	32	42	52	32
Dumfries and Galloway	3	5	6	6	8
Fife	1	1	4	0	1
Forth Valley	82	22	37	33	55
Grampian	304	328	473	563	567
Greater Glasgow	34	43	12	19	485
Highland	28	37	54	60	117
Lanarkshire	0	0	0	0	1
Lothian	212	255	548	608	802
Orkney	0	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	130	162	184	193	244
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,029	1,116	1,643	1,719	2,463

HOME DEPARTMENT

Armley Prison

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners at HM prison, Armley have been on suicide watch for each month since January 1991;

(2) how many complaints have been received at HM prison, Armley from solicitors and probation officers in each year since 1990; and if he will list the nature of them;

(3) what is the number of prison officers at HM prison, Armley as a percentage of the officially assessed establishment figure;

(4) how many prisoners at HM prison, Armley have been *(a)* held in Armley for each year to date since 1989, *(b)* held on remand for each year to date since 1989, *(c)* detained for non payment of fines for each year to date since 1989 and *(d)* transferred from HM prison, Everthorpe subsequent to the recent disturbances there; how many prisoners there are detained three to a cell; when all the new wings will be fully operational; and if he will make a statement;

(5) how many staff were employed at HM prison, Armley *(a)* in administration, *(b)* as prison officers and *(c)* educational staff for each year to date from 1989;

(6) how many prisoners in HM prison, Armley have unsupervised access to a telephone;

(7) for how many hours per *(a)* day and *(b)* week prisoners at HM prison, Armley are detained in their cells.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Philippa Drew to Mr. John Battle, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about Leeds prison.

The decision to keep a prisoner on special watch because of the risk of suicide or self harm is noted on the individual prisoner medical records and the computerised local inmate database system, which is updated daily. No central statistical records are kept.

The governor of Leeds and the area manager receive a number of enquiries from solicitors and probation staff on a wide variety of matters. Common subjects include sentence calculation, court production and personal injury claims. Copies of such correspondence are kept with the prisoners' individual records, and again no central records are maintained.

The budgeted number of prison officer grades for Leeds is 360. Staffing levels are being reviewed at Leeds to determine the required staffing level for the work being undertaken. There are 361 officer grades employed in discipline duties at Leeds.

The average daily population at Leeds prison in the years 1989 to date was as follows:

	All prisoners	*Remand prisoners*	*Fine defaulters*
1989	1,244	626	16
1990	1,064	487	14
1991	929	457	17
1992	881	390	20
1993	927	445	20
1994[1]	1,073	458	18

[1] 1994 figures are for January–November.

Forty eight prisoners were transferred to Leeds from Everthorpe prison after the recent disturbance.

The new accommodation at Leeds (E and F wings) is fully operational. "A" wing has been closed for refurbishment. No prisoners are held three to a cell designed for one prisoner.

The information on staff employed at the prison is as follows:

	Administration grades	*Officer grades (including specialists)*	*Education staff (full-time)*
1989	48	321	7
1990	48	318	7
1991	50.5	332	7.5
1992	50.5	363	6.5
1993	58	428	[1]6
1994	58.5	434	[1]6

[1] Full-time staff contracted from Manchester College since August 1993.

The figures for education staff do not include teaching staff employed on a sessional basis, whose number varies throughout the academic year. The present contract allows for the services of up to 14 part-time teachers to be used.

On average prisoners in Leeds spend 17 hours per day (119 hours per week) in their cells. The minimum time out of cell for any prisoner is three hours, the maximum twelve hours. The governor aims to increase the amount of time prisoners can spend out of their cells by restructuring shift working practices. In the longer term, a new education block and workshops are planned to provide more activity places.

No prisoners at Leeds have unsupervised access to a cardphone. All calls are recorded and may be remotely monitored by staff.

Policing, Shoreham

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the cost of policing at Shoreham harbour in West Sussex.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Sussex as to the cost of policing the demonstrations against the export of live calves at Shoreham harbour; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I understand that the latest estimate of the costs of policing the demonstrations against animal shipments at Shoreham is £1.9 million. Fifty-one per cent. of all expenditure incurred by Sussex police in 1994–95 will be met by Home Office grant.

The force should look first to its county councils for any extra cash needed. The force budget for the current financial year is some £4 million below its standard spending assessment. Making up that shortfall would attract a further £4 million in Home Office grant, and would give the force increased resources of £8 million in all. This would more than cover the reported costs of the Shoreham demonstrations.

The Government have played its part in ensuring that the Sussex police force is adequately funded. Our current proposals will enable Sussex to spend next year up to £18 million, or 14 per cent., more than it planned to spend in 1994–95.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his current estimate of the total overtime payments made to police officers involved in policing the protests at Shoreham;

(2) what has been the total cost to date of the police presence at Shoreham in connection with calf exports.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I have given today to a question from the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen).

Overtime payments made to police officers involved in policing the demonstrations could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Howard: The relative responsibilities of Ministers and chief executives of Home Office executive agencies are set out in the framework documents of those agencies, copies of them are available in the Library.

Prison Catering

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* Lindholme, *(c)* Wolds, *(d)* Wakefield, *(e)* Durham women's wing and *(f)* New Hall, Wakefield prisons the organisations providing catering; and what are the per capita costs of catering for each establishment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Philippa Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 18 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the cost of providing catering services to Doncaster, Lindholme, Wolds, Wakefield, Durham and New Hall prisons.

For Wolds and Doncaster, I would refer you to Tony Butler's reply to your earlier Question about the cost of food at privately managed prisons (Hansard 17 February 1994, column 797).

At Lindholme, Wakefield, Durham and New Hall, the catering is provided by Prison Service staff. The costs per inmate day for each establishment are:

	Staff Costs £	*Food Costs* £
Lindholme	1.05	1.36
Wakefield	1.10	1.36
Durham	1.08	1.36
New Hall	1.20	1.38

Prisoners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* Doncaster, *(b)* Lindholme, *(c)* Wolds, *(d)* Wakefield, *(e)* Durham women's wing and *(f)* New Hall, Wakefield prisons, the average number of hours per week which prisoners spend in structured activities for each of the last six months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Philippa Drew to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the average number of hours per week which prisoners have spent in structured activities during the last six months at Doncaster, Lindholme, Wolds, Wakefield, Durham women's wing and New Hall prisons.

The information requested is given in the following table:

Activity hours per prisoner per week

	July	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*
Durham	20.2	18.1	23.8	25.5	25.0	25.2
Lindholme	30.8	30.3	29.3	28.2	28.4	27.0
New Hall	27.8	28.2	26.8	27.9	32.3	31.8
Wakefield	21.8	19.6	21.5	20.5	20.7	18.9
Wolds	21.4	23.3	21.2	22.2	23.3	22.5
Doncaster	n/a	n/a	18.8	19.2	19.0	21.3

Algeria

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to prevent funds being collected in Britain to fund terrorist movements in Algeria.

Mr. Howard: I take very seriously any suggestion that foreign terrorist groups are receiving support from within this country and accordingly I ensure that the police and the Security Service have the resources and powers that they need to counter effectively any attempts to raise money here to fund terrorist attacks abroad. Any relevant information which comes to the attention of these services is thoroughly investigated, with a view to action under the criminal law, including the prevention of terrorism legislation, or under the Immigration Act 1971.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for each of his Department's executive agencies, the names of those people whose appointments he has approved that have served in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy; and what service rank they last held.

Mr. Howard: None.

Prison Staff, Pentonville

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will be pursuing disciplinary proceedings against the prison staff involved in restraining Omasase Lumumba in Pentonville prison.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison

Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about disciplinary action against the prison staff involved in restraining Mr Omasase Lumumba in Pentonville prison.

A full internal Prison Service investigation into the death of Mr Lumumba concluded that there was no evidence to justify disciplinary action against any individual officer. That remains the position.

Doncaster Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths occurred in Doncaster prison in 1994; and how many were suicides.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Doncaster prison.

Since it opened on 20 June 1994, two prisoners have died in the prison. Of these one death (that of Ian Buck) has been officially recorded as a suicide. The other (that of Shaun Webster) has still to be determined by an inquest jury.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in respect of each suicide at Doncaster prison in 1994, what was *(a)* the time the suicide occurred, *(b)* the prison wing, *(c)* the number of prisoners on that wing and *(d)* the number of staff on that wing.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Doncaster prison.

The only official verdict of suicide at Doncaster has been that of Ian Buck. He was discovered in his cell at 8.02am on 16 September on Unit B of houseblock 2. The number of prisoners unlocked on the unit that morning was 44 and there were 11 staff on duty.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of staff and number of inmates at Doncaster prison, including those on home leave, on 1 January 1995; how many deaths of inmates held in the prison have taken place since 20 June 1994; and how many prisoners have required immediate hospital admission since 20 June 1994.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. John Gunnell, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Doncaster prison.

There were 410 full time and 34 part time staff employed at Doncaster on 1 January 1995. The total inmate population at midnight on 1 January was 723. There were no prisoners on home leave at that time.

Two inmates have died within the prison and one has died in St James' hospital, Leeds. Since 20 January 1994, twelve prisoners have required immediate hospital admission needing an overnight stay. The reasons for admission include acts of deliberate self-harm, drug-related incidents and assaults by other prisoners, as well as sudden illness.

Carl Bridgewater Case

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date the Merseyside police commenced their inquiry into the Carl Bridgewater case; and on what date it was completed.

Mr. Maclean: Merseyside police began the current inquiry in February 1994. I understand that they are making every effort to complete it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which of the requests for disclosure received by the Home Secretary from representatives of the four men convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater, following the High Court judgment of 28 November, he has yet to respond; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The expert reports and records of interviews with police witnesses, which the divisional court said specifically should be disclosed, have been made available to the representatives of the convicted men. We are considering what further disclosure is now required in this case in accordance with the court's judgment.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum applicants have been removed to *(a)* Italy, *(b)* the Netherlands, *(c)* Belgium, *(d)* Germany and *(e)* France, following refusal of their application on safe third country grounds, since the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act on 26 July 1993; and how many of those so removed have been returned to the United Kingdom by the authorities of the country concerned;

(2) how many asylum applicants, excluding dependants were removed from the United Kingdom following refusal of their application on safe third country grounds in 1993; and if he will provide a breakdown of those so removed, by nationality grounds and by country to which they were removed.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information on the number of removals of asylum seekers whose applications were refused on safe third country grounds, by nationality, for 1993 is given in the table.

Information on the destination of persons removed after having their application for asylum refused on safe third country grounds and the number of those who were returned by the country removed to could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Number of asylum seekers whose applications were refused on safe third country grounds and who were removed, excluding dependants, by nationality, 1993

Country	*Number*
Afghanistan	7
Albania	1
Algeria	14
Angola	21

Number of asylum seekers whose applications were refused on safe third country grounds and who were removed, excluding dependants, by nationality, 1993

Country	Number
Bangladesh	1
Brazil	3
Bulgaria	4
China	4
Colombia	6
Ethiopia	10
Former Soviet Union	6
Former Yugoslavia	12
Ghana	27
Hungary	3
India	12
Iran	2
Iraq	6
Ivory Coast	7
Jordan	1
Kuwait	2
Lebanon	16
Liberia	6
Libya	2
Morocco	2
Niger	2
Nigeria	11
Pakistan	12
Palestine	4
Poland	18
Romania	34
Saudi Arabia	1
Sierra Leone	10
Somalia	33
Sri Lanka	64
Sudan	6
Togo	1
Tunisia	1
Turkey	59
Uganda	4
United States of America	1
Zaire	25
Nationality doubtful	6
Total	467

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum in the United Kingdom were refused on safe third country grounds in 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: In 1994, 865 applications for asylum were refused on safe third country grounds.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will provide a breakdown of current costs to his Department associated with removing from the United Kingdom persons refused asylum on safe third country grounds;

(2) what was the total cost to his Department in the financial year 1993–94 of removing from the United Kingdom persons refused asylum on safe third country grounds.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Staff costs relating to removing people refused asylum on safe third country grounds are not recorded separately, and details of escort, detention and removal costs relating to such cases are not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the available information suggests that in the majority of cases in which people were removed to safe third countries in the financial year 1993–94, the directions for removal would have been given to the inward carrier, who would have been responsible for the costs of escort and detention and for the removal itself.

Police Budget, Merseyside

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the chief constable of Merseyside on the police budget.

Mr. Maclean: The budget for the Merseyside police is a matter for the Merseyside police authority.

My right hon. and learned Friend received a letter on 29 September from the chief constable of Merseyside, Mr. Sharples, on the subject of the new police funding formula for 1995–96. Mr. Sharples was a member of the delegation from Merseyside which met my right hon. and learned Friend on 14 December 1994 to discuss the proposals, announced on 1 December 1994, for the funding to be available for policing on Merseyside in 1995–96.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what amounts have been requested by way of section 11 spending in 1995–96 by each local education authority; and what has been the total amount requested in England.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Most existing projects which will still be running in 1995–96 relate to education. It is hoped to notify local authorities shortly of their grant allocations for 1995–96 expenditure in relation to those projects. In addition, the authorities listed in the table have requested for 1995–96 the amounts of grant shown in respect of new education projects.

England

Authority	Amount requested £
Avon	536,190
Barking and Dagenham	265,750
Barnet	160,000
Bedfordshire	87,500
Berkshire	19,500
Bexley	20,644
Birmingham	319,143
Bolton	79,500
Bradford	3,692,728
Brent	370,000
Bromley	28,800
Buckinghamshire	1,138,021
Bury	18,700
Cambridgeshire	118,000
Camden	1,403,561
Cleveland	92,464
Coventry	165,355
Croydon	427,174
Derbyshire	227,940
Devon	83,000
Doncaster	12,088
Dorset	45,700
Dudley	770,000
Ealing	1,149,762
East Sussex	67,000
Enfield	456,597
Essex	64,511
Gateshead	27,000
Gloucestershire	17,071
Greenwich	1,011,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	413,000
Hampshire	66,750

England

Authority	*Amount requested £*
Haringey	250,000
Harrow	26,989
Havering	35,484
Hereford and Worcester	175,500
Hertfordshire	29,000
Hillingdon	126,828
Hounslow	412,000
Islington	1,201,5000
Kent	90,000
Kingston upon Thames	53,064
Kirklees	2,000,000
Lambeth	1,587,940
Lancashire	909,079
Leeds	369,924
Leicestershire	49,000
Lewisham	1,459,424
Lincolnshire	18,437
Liverpool	154,871
Manchester	101,500
Merton	79,120
Newham	140,320
Norfolk	217,051
North Tyneside	28,493
Northamptonshire	211,277
Nottinghamshire	404,467
Oldham	121,000
Oxfordshire	119,500
Redbridge	149,000
Richmond	25,200
Rochdale	97,000
Rotherham	333,767
Salford	99,110
Sandwell	316,753
Sefton	24,165
Sheffield	313,500
Shropshire	89,072
Somerset	34,273
South Tyneside	160,073
Southwark	839,528
St. Helens	20,064
Staffordshire	310,744
Suffolk	27,500
Sunderland	52,920
Surrey	47,985
Sutton	108,425.
Tameside	26,900
Tower Hamlets	949,484
Trafford	48,645
Wakefield	222,500
Walsall	1,320,500
Waltham Forest	143,757
Wandsworth	158,931
Warwickshire	863,500
Westminster	136,250
Wigan	80,000
Wiltshire	54,300
Wolverhampton	1,323,600
Total	32,103,663

Wales

Authority	*Amount requested £*
Clwyd	139,968
Gwent	184,000
South Glamorgan	24,000
West Glamorgan	245,884
Total	593,852

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many illegal immigrants have been apprehended during the past year; and how many have been sent back to their home country;

(2) how many known illegal immigrants there are in the United Kingdom; and what measures he is taking to apprehend them.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: When a person is known to be here unlawfully, firm action is taken by the immigration service in cooperation with the police and other agencies. It is not possible to give the total number of immigrants who are here unlawfully. The available information relates to those who have been detected and served with a notice of illegal entry or a notice of intention to deport.

In 1994, 7,240 illegal entrants were detected. In the same period, 3,670 were removed, or departed voluntarily, from the United Kingdom. In addition, 4,750 persons were issued with a notice of intention to deport because of a breach of conditions of leave to enter or remain, and 1,080 such persons were removed, or departed voluntarily, from the United Kingdom in 1994.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been granted asylum during the past year from *(a)* non-Commonwealth and *(b)* Commonwealth countries.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The provisional information is that in 1994, 825 asylum applicants were recognised as refugees and granted asylum. Of this figure, 45 were from Commonwealth countries.

Parkhurst Prison

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) at what date in October 1994 he received a copy of the letter from the Chief Inspector of Prisons to the Director General of the Prison Service concerning security at Her Majesty's prison, Parkhurst; and if he will place a copy of the letter in the Library;

(2) what action he took following receipt of the copy of the Chief Inspector of Prisons' letter to the Director General of the Prison Service concerning security of Her Majesty's prison, Parkhurst; on how many occasions he wrote to the director general concerning security at Her Majesty's prison Parkhurst and on what dates; and what steps he instructed the director general to take.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 10 January 1995]:* Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Stephen Tumim, wrote to the Director General of the Prison Service, Derek Lewis, on 7 October 1994. His letter set out some concerns about security at Parkhurst expressed by an inspection team. As I announced in my statement of 10 January 1995, *Official Report,* columns *31–46,* I have placed a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

A copy of the letter was received in my office on Friday 7 October 1994. I spoke to the director general on the same day and again that weekend and asked for a full report. I received that report on 11 October 1994. On the basis of advice from the governor of Parkhurst, the director general advised me that all Judge Tumim's recommendations had been implemented.

My office wrote to the director general on 14 October 1994 to ask for further details on the use of the X-ray machine in the prison's gatelodge and on plans to search

all staff coming on duty. The director general replied to my office on 21 October 1994, again informing me that procedures had been changed to address Judge Tumim's criticism.

Prisons (Satellite Television)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all prisons that have satellite television installed in *(a)* cells and *(b)* communal areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 19 January 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about satellite television in Prison Service establishments.

Two establishments in England and Wales have the capacity for prisoners to watch satellite television in cells and 105 establishments have the capacity for prisoners to watch satellite television in communal areas.

Television viewing equipment—including satellite television—is not paid for by taxpayers' money but from an establishment's general purpose fund which is largely derived from prisoners' own contributions.

A list of these establishments which use satellite television in cells or communal areas is attached. A copy of this list has been placed in the Library of the House.

Establishments which use satellite television in cells or communal areas

Area	*In communal area*	*In cell*
Central		
	Ashwell	
	Brinsford	
	Featherstone	
	Glen Parva	
	Leicester	
	Long Lartin	
	Stafford	
The Chilterns		
	Coldingley	
	Finnamore Wood	
	Onley	
	Reading	
East Anglia		
	Hollesley Bay	
	Norwich	
	Wayland	
	Highpoint	
East Midlands		
	Doncaster	Stocken
	Lincoln	
	Lindholme	
	Moorland	
	Morton Hall	
	North Sea Camp	
	Nottingham	
	Ranby	
	Whatton	
Kent		
	Aldington	
	Blantyre House	
	Canterbury	
	Cookham Wood	
	Dover	
	Maidstone	
	Rochester	
	Stanford Hill	
	Swaleside	
London North		
	Bedford	
	Grendon	
	Littlehey	
	Pentonville	
	Spring Hill	
	Wellingborough	
	Whitemoor	
	Woodhill	
	Wormwood Scrubs	
London South		
	Albany	
	Belmarsh	
	Brixton	
	Camp Hill	
	Parkhurst	
	Wandsworth	
	Feltham	
Mercia		
	Brockhill	
	Foston Hall	
	Hewell Grange	
	Stoke Heath	
	Sudbury	
	Swinfen Hall	
	Werrington	
North east		
	Acklington	
	Castington	
	Frankland	
	Full Sutton	
	Holme House	
	Kirklevington	
	Low Newton	
North west	Haverigg	Garth
	Hindley	
	Kirkham	
	Lancaster Castle	
	Lancaster Farms	
	Preston	
	Thorn Cross	
South coast		
	Downview	
	Ford	
	Haslar	
	Highdown	
	Kingston	
	Lewes	
	Send	
Trans pennine		
	Leeds	
	Liverpool	
	New Hall	
	Risley	
Wales and west		
	Bristol	
	Cardiff	
	Erlestoke	
	Gloucester	
	Leyhill	
	Pucklechurch	
	Swansea	
	Usk	
Wessex		
	Channings Wood	
	Dartmoor	
	Dorchester	
	Exeter	
	Portland	
	Shepton Mallet	

Establishments which use satellite television in cells or communal areas

Area	*In communal area*	*In cell*
Yorkshire		
	Askham Grange	
	Deerbolt	
	Everthorpe	
	Hatfield	
	Hull	
	Northallerton	
	Rudgate	
	Thorp Arch	
	Wetherby	
	The Wolds	

DEFENCE

Defence Procurement Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many public service jobs have been created by the establishment of the Defence Procurement Agency to be located in Bristol

Mr. Freeman: On present plans, the Procurement Executive will relocate to north Bristol between autumn 1995 and autumn 1996. We expect between 500 and 600 local public service jobs to be created over this period.

Departmental Responsibilities

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the division of responsibilities and relationship between his departmental Ministers and agencies.

Mr. Freeman: For each agency, the position is as set out in the framework document for that agency, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House at the time of launch.

Used Reactor Cores

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the location of each of the used reactor cores from his Department's nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Freeman: Used reactor cores that have been removed from my Department's nuclear-powered submarines are held at the following locations:

Site	*Current holding of used reactor cores*
BNFL Sellafield	38.5
Devonport Royal Dockyard	3.0
Rosyth Royal Dockyard	2.5
Naval Reactor Test Establishment, Dounreay	1.0

Procurement and Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what files his Department currently holds regarding (i) brokerage fees, (ii) agency fees and (iii) commissions with regard to procurement and maintenance contracts.

Mr. Freeman: Individual branches within the Department maintain files appropriate to their business needs. The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Naval Procurement

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the naval procurement programme for 1995 to 1997.

Mr. Freeman: The naval procurement programme includes the continuation of the Trident programmes, a helicopter carrier, EH101 Merlin ASW helicopters, further type 23 frigates, Sandown class single role minehunters, and Sea Harrier F/A2s, the upgrading of Lynx mark 3 helicopters to mark 8 standard and the purchase of Spearfish torpedoes. We also remain fully involved in the common new generation frigate programme, Project Horizon. In addition, we have issued invitations to tender for replacement LPDs, batch 2 Trafalgar class submarines, an oceanographic survey vessel and another batch of type 23 frigates.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards ensuring competition in naval procurement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) on 22 November 1994, *Official Report* column *134*.

Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Vessels

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost to the Exchequer including subsidy and post-acceptance refit costs, of *(a)* AOR1 and *(b)* AOR2.

Mr. Freeman: The total cost to the end of December 1994 to my Department, including post-acceptance rectification work, is £131.130 million and £159.460 million (actual prices) for AOR 01 and AOR 02 respectively. Final costs for both vessels have still to be agreed. An independent assessment of Harland and Wolff's bid for AOR 01 concluded that the bid contained no element of subsidy. Neither was there any element of subsidy in Swan Hunter's bid for AOR 02. The Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development made payments of £53 million to Harland and Wolff as part of the yard's privatisation. These payments were tied to progress in completing AOR 01.

Military Equipment

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military needs three rough terrain wheeled tractors are required as set out in the future purchase No. EM and D1A/152; what consideration has been given to leasing the equipment; what information he has as to the availability of such equipment on the civil market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The three rough terrain wheeled tractors in future purchase No. EM and D1A/152 will be deployed in the Falkland Islands and used for the handling and movement of International Standards Organisation containers on semi-trailers. Vehicles that meet the military specification for this requirement are not currently available for leasing or immediate purchase on the civil market.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what military needs it was decided that 13 rough terrain container handlers were required; what

consideration was given to leasing the equipment; what information he has as to the availability of such equipment on the civil market; why the tender has been cancelled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Rough terrain container handlers are used to handle International Standards Organisation containers on operations and during major exercises in the field. Vehicles that meet the military specification of this requirement are not currently available for leasing or immediate purchase on the civil market. The tender has been delayed to modify the specification and broaden the scope of potential bidders; it will be reissued.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average rent per week in service married quarters; and what was the average rent in each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The average rents for Service married quarters owned by my Department are given below. These figures are based on furnished accommodation in England and represent the most commonly occupied quarters.

Married quarters charge for last five years

	1990–91 £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £
Officers	32.65	37.17	40.67	41.30	43.12
Other ranks	20.91	23.87	26.04	26.46	27.74

Additionally, most personnel pay a contribution in lieu of council tax.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many lone parents there are living in accommodation owned by his Ministry.

Mr. Soames: As at 16 January 1995 there were 647 lone parents in married quarter accommodation owned by my Department. Lone parents are defined as widows or widowers, divorced, separated or unmarried personnel who have parental responsibility for a child or children within the terms of the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of his Department's houses and their estimated total value in each of the districts and boroughs of Wales and in Wales as a whole.

Mr. Soames: Although we maintain no record by district and borough, as at 30 September, my Department owned the following housing properties in each county in Wales:

	Service married quarters	*MOD civilian houses*	*Former married quarters in the process of sale*	*Former civilian houses in the process of sale*	*Total*
Clwyd	292	0	0	0	292
Dyfed	451	25	26	1	503
Gwent	175	0	15	0	190
Gwynedd	391	0	0	0	391
Mid Glamorgan	6	0	0	0	6
Powys	205	0	0	0	205
South Glamorgan	965	0	0	0	965
West Glamorgan	16	0	1	0	17
Total	2,501	25	42	1	2,569

The married quarter returns are reported by service unit based on the unit's location, and some of the properties may therefore be located in a neighbouring county. The information requested on valuations is not available.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's houses remain vacant in each of the districts and boroughs of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Although we maintain no record by district and borough, as at 30 September, my Department owned the following vacant housing properties in each county in Wales:

	Service married quarters	*MOD civilian houses*	*Former married quarters in the process of sale*	*Total*
Clwyd	81	0	0	81
Dyfed	56	8	26	90
Gwent	107	0	15	122
Gwynedd	16	0	0	16
Mid Glamorgan	0	0	0	0
Powys	20	0	0	20
South Glamorgan	33	0	0	33
West Glamorgan	4	0	1	5
Total	317	8	42	367

The married quarter returns are reported by service unit based on the unit's location, and some of the properties may therefore be located in a neighbouring county.

A large number of the vacant service married quarters were undergoing or awaiting major maintenance, held for future deployments or formed part of the management margin needed to ensure that accommodation is available for entitled service families.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the improvement and development of his Department's houses in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 17 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw). My Department's plans for improving the quality and management of our married quarter estates include our properties in Wales.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds his Department has not pursued its plans to establish a housing trust for the sale of the married quarters estate.

Mr. Soames: The problems surrounding the Housing Trust, as originally conceived, related to its classification as a private sector body. As my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, announced on 17 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1*, we are proceeding instead with the creation of a Defence Housing Executive, thus building on the efforts and resources invested in the trust proposal.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total cost to date for management consultants and merchant bankers who have advised on his Department's plans for the future of the married quarters estate.

Mr. Soames: The total value of invoices presented to date by management and other consultants and merchant banks assisting in developing the Department's plans for the future of the married quarters estate is some £3,300,000 exclusive of VAT. The work undertaken in developing the Housing Trust proposals will form the basis for the creation of the Defence Housing Executive as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 17 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1*.

Mr. Paul Martin

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Mr. Paul Martin has yet return to his post since he was suspended from work for the Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No. Mr. Martin has tendered his resignation from the Ministry of Defence.

Military Museums

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those military museums that currently have fewer than 15,000 visitors a year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A list of the military museums which have fewer than 15,000 visitors per year, based on the most recent figures available, is as follows.

Museum:

Royal Artillery Regimental Museum, Woolwich
Royal Signals Museum, Blandford
Royal Logistics Corps Museum, Deepcut
Royal Army Medical Corps Museum, Mytchett
Royal Army Dental Corps Museum, Aldershot
Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps Museum, Aldershot
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Museum, Arborfield
Corps of Royal Military Police Museum, Chichester
Intelligence corps Museum, Ashford
Household Cavalry Museum, Windsor
The Royal Highland Fusiliers Museum, Glasgow
The Black Watch Museum, Perth
The Gordon Highlanders Museum, Aberdeen
The Royal Anglian Regimental Museum (Suffolk Regiment), Bury St. Edmunds
The Staffordshire Regiment, Lichfield
Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (Lancashire Fusiliers) Museum, Bury
The Regiments of Gloucestershire Museum, Gloucester
The Duke of Edinburgh Royal Regiment Museum, Salisbury
The South Wales Borderers and Monmouthshire Regimental Museum of the Royal Regiment of Wales (24th/21st Foot), Brecon
The Devon and Dorset Regiment Museum, Dorchester
The Green Howards Museum, Richmond

The list comprise those museums in receipt of public funding, but does not include military museums which are privately funded or run by regimental associations.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total financial cost of the United Kingdom's commitment to the Falkland Islands since 1979.

Mr. Soames: The cost of the Falklands commitment to Defence Votes between 1982–83 and 1993–94 was some £3.7 billion at outturn prices, equivalent to £6.0 billion at 1993–94 prices. This covers the estimated costs of maintaining the Falkland Islands garrison as well as campaign costs and the replacement, where appropriate, of equipment and stores lost or consumed during the campaign. Costs other than defence costs, and costs prior to 1982–83, are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Gulf War

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the most recently revised estimate of the financial cost to the United Kingdom of the Gulf war.

Mr. Soames: The current estimate of the additional military cost of the Gulf conflict is £2,489,000,000, spread over several years. As part of its normal insurance business, the Export Credits Guarantee Department has paid £658,000,000 of claims arising from the situation in the Gulf in 1990–91 and which have yet to be recovered. Other Departments incurred minor costs in respect of the conflict.

The bulk of these costs have been offset by the generous cash contributions from the other Governments totalling £2,049,000,000.

Aircraft Statistics

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the present number of *(a)* helicopters and *(b)* fixed-wing aircraft in each of the services.

Mr. Soames: The details requested are as follows:

Service	Aircraft	Number
Royal Navy	Helicopter	155
	fixed wing	48
Army	Helicopter	302
	fixed wing	28
Royal Air Force	Helicopter	173
	fixed wing	939

[1] Including those Chinook undergoing mid-life update.

Property Management Costs

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a detailed breakdown of the £400,000 property management costs mentioned in the C31 consultation document of the defence costs study.

Mr. Soames: The property management costs of option A referred to in the consultation document are estimated to be £534,000 per annum in the longer term. Some £400,000 of this relates to the costs associated with the workforce that is contracted to undertake planned and routine maintenance tasks at Pitreavie. In addition, the estimate includes an amount—approximately £100,000—for average annual expenditure on unplanned maintenance tasks at Pitreavie which is derived from historical data. The remainder represents property management expenditure at Faslane.

Ministerial Visit (Liverpool)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Minister of State for Defence Procurement's visit to Liverpool at the Defence Accounts Agency on Monday 16 January.

Mr. Freeman: I took the opportunity to acknowledge the efficiency measures already implemented by the in-house team in preparation for the aware of a three-year service level agreement covering the work of the Directorate of Accounts (Bills) on behalf of the MOD.

National Service

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will propose the striking of a medal or other certification to recognise the contribution made by men and women who undertook national service.

Mr. Soames: We have no plans to institute a medal or certificate specifically for those who served a period of national service in the armed forces. National service men were, however, eligible for the range of official awards approved by the sovereign at the time.

Inhumane Weapons

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the inhumane weapons convention to be ratified.

Mr. Soames: We expect to ratify the UN weaponry convention by the end of February 1995, and in time to participate as a full state party in the forthcoming review conference.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to support an amendment to the inhumane weapons convention to prohibit the military use of lasers to blind combatants on the battlefield.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom is looking positively at proposals to add to the UN weaponry convention a new protocol covering the use of lasers to blind.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the inhumane weapons review conference in September; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom is working positively towards strengthening the UN weaponry convention at the forthcoming review conference.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the British armed forces possess lasers designed to blind combatants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom armed forces do not possess and currently have no plans to develop or procure any laser weapon designed permanently to blind enemy troops or to disrupt their eyesight temporarily. We are, however, researching the technology associated with laser weapons in order to develop effective defences against such weapons should they be deployed against our armed forces.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Britain has *(a)* considered and *(b)* tested lasers designed to blind combatants.

Mr. Freeman: The United Kingdom maintains an interest in all developments in laser technologies, including those related to laser weapons. A major objective of the Department's laser research programme is to understand the nature of the threat which might be posed by the deployment and use of laser weapons against UK forces and, if necessary, to develop appropriate protective countermeasures. The UK has no plans to develop or test a laser weapon designed permanently to blind human targets. The feasibility of making use of temporary dazzle effects was investigated in 1983 and tests on one system were conducted which were subsequently discontinued.

Golf Courses

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many golf courses are sited on land owned by his Department;

(2) what has been the total cost in each of the past five years of the upkeep of golf courses sited on land owned by his Department.

Mr. Soames: My noble friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Weapons Sales

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the policy of his Department on the sale of weapons that can be used for torture to countries with poor human rights records.

Mr. Freeman: It is my Department's policy to ensure that all relevant human rights considerations are taken into account when applications are made to promote and supply licensable defence equipment overseas. It is Her Majesty's Government's policy to avoid the transfer of such equipment which would be likely to be used to

violate human rights. Advice on this matter is normally provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Army Finance and Audit Office

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Army finance and audit office.

Mr. Soames: As part of Front Line First, proposals to devolve the functions of the army finance and audit office, currently based at Ashton under Lyne, down to unit level were detailed in a consultation document issued on 21 July 1994.

During the consultation period, understandable local concerns were expressed both about the loss of jobs in Ashton under Lyne and the weakening of Greater Manchester's long and proud links with the army. Points were also raised about the detailed costings used, and the effectiveness of the proposed alternative auditing arrangements but no new significant defence-related arguments have emerged. Having given careful consideration to these points, I am satisfied that the proposal to close AFAO is sound on both management and financial grounds, and I have decided that it will close on 31 March 1996, whereupon the audit task will be devolved to unit level. We will, of course, continue to consult the trade unions about the detailed implementation of these measures.

Army Storage Facilities

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to rationalise army storage facilities following the defence costs study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As part of Front Line First, proposals to rationalise army storage facilities were detailed in a consultation document issued on 19 August 1994. A total of 35 responses have been received from trade unions, local authorities and other interested parties; all have been subject to the most careful and detailed consideration. Understandable local concerns were expressed on the effect on employment and the local community. No significant new defence-related arguments have however emerged, nor have any new suggestions been made which might cause us to alter our original proposals, which flow from a reduction in the army's storage requirements.

I therefore have to announce that we shall now move to implement our plans to supply the army from a smaller number of larger, more efficiently utilised sites, supported by a new distribution network utilised sites, supported by a new distribution network utilising best practice from industry. I am confident these changes can be introduced without detriment to operational capability.

Our proposals will mean the closure of 13 army static logistic support and engineer support units. The ordnance support unit Liphook will close by 31 March 1995, and the following by 31 March 1996:

- Regional depot Hereford
- Regional depot Stirling
- Ordnance support unit Ashford
- Ordnance support unit Bicester
- Ordnance support unit Burscough
- Ordnance support unit Feltham
- Ordnance support unit Thetford
- Ordnance support unit Weyhill
- Supply depot Colchester
- 320 engineer park Thetford
- 322 engineer park Hessay York
- 324 engineer park Stirling

Army storage will in future, with some staff enhancements, be concentrated at the following depots:

- Base ordnance depot Donnington
- Base ordnance depot Bicester, including the Bicester sub-depot at Thatcham
- Ordnance stores depot, which forms part of the Longtown ammunition depot
- Training material park Warminster
- Training material park Sennybridge

In support, a number of units will be reduced and reorganised to become distribution outlets, by 31 March 1996. These are:

- Regional depot Catterick, including stores sub-depot Hessay
- Ordnance support unit Colchester
- Ordnance support unit Old Dalby
- Supply depot Aldershot
- Supply depot Bulford

In addition, 321 engineer park at Longmoor will re-role and become a detachment to central engineer park Long Marston.

We shall continue to consult staff and trade unions about the detailed implementation of these measures.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 20 January 1995

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Domestic Violence

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what analysis he has carried out of the likely cost to the legal aid fund of the provisions of the Family Home and Domestic Violence Bill; and when he expects to publish this analysis.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is estimated that the provisions of the Family Home and Domestic Violence Bill, when fully implemented, could result in some small savings to the legal aid fund. The Lord Chancellor has no plans to publish the analysis.

Contempt of Court

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines are laid down for the judiciary on powers with regard to contempt of court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Guidelines on sentencing for contempt of court are laid down for the judiciary by the Court of Appeal.

Rape Cases

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will take action to ensure that half of all rape cases are heard before female judges.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Rape cases are heard before High Court judges and designated senior circuit judges. The allocation of all business in the Crown court is a judicial function, carried out in accordance with directions issued by the Lord Chief Justice and presiding judges, and is not a matter in which I may intervene.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Driver Training

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation he has done of the Devon and Cornwall driver rectification scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The scheme has been identified by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary as good practice and will be promulgated to other forces.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pilot driver rectification schemes there have been in the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not centrally available.

Drivers (Reoffenders)

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the reoffending rate for drivers prosecuted for driving without due care and attention; and what reoffending rates have been achieved by the pilot driver rectification schemes that have operated in different parts of the country.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is not available.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the occupations that are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974; if he will revise the Act so that all citizens, irrespective of their occupation, are treated the same; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration he has given to reviewing the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Maclean: Exceptions to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 are most conveniently listed in annex E to the Government's 1993 Green Paper "Disclosure of Criminal Records for Employment Vetting Purposes" CM 2319. A copy is available in the Library. Since that paper was published, osteopaths, chiropractors and operators of the national lottery have been added to the list of excepted categories.

We have no plans to amend the Act itself. However, we are reviewing the scope and scale of the exceptions to the Act as part of a wider review of employment vetting arrangements. We intend to publish in the spring a White Paper setting out our proposals.

Charging of Suspects

Mr. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the basis and rationale for the numerical system in use by police forces to decide whether to charge a suspect with an offence; and if he will give details of the system.

Mr. Maclean: Decisions on charging are matters for chief police officers and the Crown Prosecution Service. I understand that systems offering guidance to police officers in deciding whether to charge or caution a suspect, based upon weights given to different factors, have been in use in a number of forces for some time. Systems vary between forces, but, in general, they are intended to prevent inappropriate use of cautioning.

Director General of the Prison Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement giving the conditions of employment of Mr. D. Lewis as the Director General of the Prison Service.

Mr. Howard: Mr. Lewis is employed on a three-year fixed-term appointment, which can be extended to five years by agreement between him and the Department. Apart from his pay and pension, for which separate arrangements have been made, his conditions of

employment are as stated in the civil service management code, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he list the objectives to be met by the head of the Prison Service in order to trigger pay bonuses and their link to the bonus scale;

(2) what was the bonus objective of the head of the Prison Service in respect of limiting criminal damage to prisons by prisoners.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) on 18 January, column *531*.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what emphasis was made in the contract of employment for the Director General of the Prison Service in relation to *(a)* financial management and *(b)* personnel in respect of relations with the prison officers and inmates.

Mr. Howard: The Director General's responsibilities in respect of financial management and personnel matters are set out not in his contract of employment but in the Prison Service's framework document, a copy of which is in the Library.

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Director General of the Prison Service's contract ceases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The appointment runs for three years in the first instance, until 5 January 1996, but may be extended to five years by mutual agreement.

Mr. Mahmood Hussein Mattan

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an inquiry into the destruction of his Department's records relating to the execution of Mr. Mahmood Hussein Mattan in Cardiff in 1952.

Mr. Howard: No. My Department's records relating to this capital murder case were destroyed in November 1986, in the course of the standard review processes applied to departmental records under the Public Records Acts.

Records are preserved at such reviews only if they are of continuing administrative use to the Department or if they are selected for permanent preservation at the Public Record Office on the basis of their historical interest. The vast majority of Home Office records are destroyed during these review processes.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report,* column *248,* if he will list the names of *(a)* all the members of the ministerial group on domestic violence and their respective Departments and *(b)* all the agencies to whom the group intends to send the circular.

Mr. Maclean: The membership of the ministerial group on domestic violence is as follows:

Member	
David Maclean MP (chairman)	Home Office
John M. Taylor MP	Lord Chancellor's Department
Sir Derek Spencer QC MP	The Law Officers' Department
Robert Jones MP	Department of the Environment
The Baroness Cumberlege; CBE	Department of Health
Ann Widdecombe MP	Employment Department
Eric Forth MP	Department for Education
Alistair Burt MP	Department of Social Security
The Baroness Denton of Wakefield; CBE	Northern Ireland Office
The Right Hon. Lord Fraser of Carmyllie: QC	Scottish Office
Roderick Richards MP	Welsh Office
David Heathcoat-Amory MP	HM Treasury

The list of agencies to which the inter-agency circular on domestic violence will be sent has not yet been finalised, but it will include both statutory and voluntary agencies including, for example, practitioners in the areas of criminal justice, health and housing, and other groups likely to come into contact with those experiencing domestic violence.

Missing Children

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made on a national register of missing children.

Mr. Maclean: The national missing persons bureau was opened at New Scotland Yard in March 1994 and acts as a clearing house for information on vulnerable missing persons reported to the police, including children. It is intended that this function will in due course be undertaken by the police national computer.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many debates in the House on the M11 link road have been initiated by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Norris: I have been asked to reply.

None.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his oral answer of 12 January, *Official Report,* column 286, on what basis, if the subject of a question was known to him, he would decide whether to include in his reply both formal and informal engagements.

Mr. Newton: On the basis of providing accurate information about relevant contacts, other than correspondence and telephone conversations, to the extent that it was practicable to do so without incurring disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charter Marks

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will review the charter mark awarded to British Gas.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: We have naturally been concerned at some of the media coverage of British Gas in recent months and the citizens charter unit in the Cabinet Office has been talking to Ofgas and to the Gas Consumers Council, which collects detailed information about British Gas's service to customers. Ofgas's latest figures show that British Gas is meeting the targets for the 39 detailed standards of service set by the regulatory body.

The chairman of the Gas Consumers Council has now written to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster expressing concern at evidence of growing consumer dissatisfaction with British Gas's service. The letter stresses that the council has faith in British Gas as a company that puts safety first and deservedly earned the charter mark in 1993. It suggests that our monitoring of British Gas's charter mark should focus on the performance of the company's newly formed business units against the criteria by which the award was judged and that if British Gas no longer meets the criteria it should be given a time scale in which to make the necessary improvements.

The charter mark focuses on service to the customer and we are obviously always very interested in the views of bodies that represent customers. We will consider the council's concerns and seek to establish the facts. A decision on whether to take away a charter mark would be made only if there were a significant and sustained deterioration in service to the customer.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what criteria are established for the awarding of charter marks to the privatised utilities.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The privatised utilities are judged against the same criteria as other public service providers. The criteria are:

Standards—setting, monitoring and publication of explicit standards;

Information and openness—full, accurate information, readily available in plain language;

Choice and consultation—choice wherever possible, regular and systematic consultation with those who use services;

Courtesy and helpfulness—courteous and helpful service, from public servants who will normally wear name badges;

Putting things right—if things go wrong, an apology, a full explanation and a swift and effective remedy;

Value for money—efficient and economic delivery of public services and independent validation of performance against standards;

Customer satisfaction—evidence of measures in place which identify improvements and levels of customer satisfaction;

Measurable improvements is the quality of service over the last two or more years—details of the improvements made with evidence that customers appreciate them; and

An innovative enhancement to services without any extra cost to the taxpayer or consumer—details of planned innovations and evidence that they reflect the concerns of customers.

Civil and Defence Research

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the ratio of Government expenditure on civil and defence research for each financial year since 1984.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information requested is shown in the table.

Government expenditure on civil and defence research and development, as percentage of grand total: 1984–85 to 1994–95 (Percentage terms, rounded to nearest whole number)

	1984–85	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
[1]Civil Research and Development	53	53	55	57	58	58	59	57	59	57	58
Defence	47	47	45	43	42	42	41	43	41	43	42
[1]Grand Total £ million	4,026	4,334	4,358	4,424	4,522	4,810	5,042	5,237	5,449	5,715	5,574

[1] Includes indicative UK contribution to the EC budget in respect of Research and Development.

Source:

Statistical supplement to the Forward Look of Government-Funded Science, Engineering and Technology 1994 (table 1.3.1).

Autism

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will introduce a charter for persons with autism in line with the charter adopted at the fourth Autism Europe Congress in May 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: There are no plans to introduce a charter for persons with autism or any other disability. The citizens charter applies to all users of public services equally, including people with disabilities. Public services should be accessible to all those who need them, including persons with autism. To help improve the accessibility of public services the citizens charter unit published "The Citizen's Charter and People With Disabilities—A Checklist" in 1994. This checklist is to help public service organisations ensure that they take account of the needs of people with disabilities when making decisions about services and how to make them available to all their customers.

Public Appointments

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what further progress has been made in appointing more women and black and Asian people as member of public bodies.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I am pleased to announce a further rise in the number of women and black and Asian people holding appointments. At 1 September 1994, the proportion of public appointments held by women was 30 per cent. compared with 28 per cent. in 1993. The percentage of black and Asian appointees has increased from 2.3 per cent. to 2.6 per cent. over the same period.

Full details will be published shortly in the 1994 edition of "Public Bodies".

These two increases show that the Government have been able actively to pursue their policy of appointing more women and members of the ethnic minorities while at the same time ensuring that appointments are made on the basis of aptitude and merit.

TREASURY

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average rate of the basic rate of income tax would have to be in 1996–97 if the average total personal tax burden on the average-sized family on average earnings were to average the same over the period from April 1992 to April 1997 as it did in April 1992 to April 1993, assuming that no other tax changes beyond indexation for inflation are announced between now and April 1997.

Sir George Young: Tax payments in 1996–97 will depend on the level of earnings and prices in 1996–97 and on household composition and spending patterns.

Royal Household

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *290–91*, how many of the directors of the royal household have a salary abatement in excess of 6 per cent.; what was the percentage salary increase for the director who is on a short-term contract; how many had salary increases in excess of £5,000 per annum and how many in excess of £20,000 per annum; in which years performance pay has been available to the director on short-term contract; and how many directors in 1993–94 had higher salaries than the principal private secretary to the Queen and the keeper of the privy purse.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The director of finance and property services is on a fixed-term contract. He is only director in the royal household who has a salary abatement—currently valued at £18,500—on top of the 6 per cent. after-tax salary deduction, or whose salary exceeds that of the principal private secretary to the Queen and the keeper of the privy purse. His performance bonus for the year to 30 September 1994, the first year of the contract, is yet to be determined. His salary was increased by 5.4 per cent.— £5,940—with effect from 1 April 1994, in line with the Senior Salaries Review Body award to comparable civil servants. No other director in the royal household received a salary increase in excess of £5,000.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was *(a)* the value of his standard spending assessment assessments and *(b)* the total grants after the area cost adjustment as a per capita figure for the counties of (i) Humberside, (ii) Derbyshire *(c)* Buckinghamshire and (iv) Surrey for each financial year from 1990–91.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The standard spending assessment, national non-domestic rate and revenue support grant figures for the named county area from 1990–91 to 1995–96 are set out in the tables.

The SSA figures are those for the year in question and have not been adjusted to a comparable basis for year-on-year comparisons.

The 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 figures for Surrey do not include any SSA, NNDR or RSG element to the receiver for the Metropolitan police district in respect of police services provided by the Metropolitan police in parts of Surrey. The 1995–96 figures for Buckinghamshire do not include any element to the Thames Valley police authority in respect of police services throughout Buckinghamshire.

The 1995–96 figures are those issued in the provisional local government finance settlement 1995—96, announced on 1 December 1994.

1990–91

	SSA £ *million*	*SSA/Head* £	*NNDR* £ *million*	*NNDR/Head* £	*RSG* £ *million*	*RSG/Head* £
Humberside	530.3	624	190.9	224	158.0	186
Derbyshire	507.6	549	208.8	226	100.3	109
Buckinghamshire	365.3	582	137.4	219	97.3	155
Surrey	506.6	507	228.9	229	83.3	83

1991–92

	SSA £ *million*	*SSA/Head* £	*NNDR* £ *million*	*NNDR/Head* £	*RSG* £ *million*	*RSG/Head* £
Humberside	627.7	733	227.1	265	153.0	179
Derbyshire	602.2	648	247.5	266	85.0	91
Buckinghamshire	437.8	690	161.8	255	99.7	157
Surrey	610.2	610	266.4	266	77.9	78

1992–93

	SSA £ million	SSA/Head £	NNDR £ million	NNDR/Head £	RSG £ million	RSG/Head £
Humberside	667.1	776	224.5	261	277.0	322
Derbyshire	637.6	683	245.2	263	211.5	227
Buckinghamshire	474.3	741	160.3	250	195.8	306
Surrey	656.6	656	264.6	264	223.4	223

1993–94

	SSA £ million	SSA/Head £	NNDR £ million	NNDR/Head £	RSG £ million	RSG/Head £
Humberside	641.1	733	210.3	240	305.1	349
Derbyshire	609.7	649	226.0	240	238.5	254
Buckinghamshire	466.2	728	153.9	240	190.3	297
Surrey	614.0	594	243.3	235	162.4	157

1994–95

	SSA £ million	SSA/Head £	NNDR £ million	NNDR/Head £	RSG £ million	RSG/Head £
Humberside	659.5	748	194.7	221	329.2	373
Derbyshire	639.4	675	209.3	221	211.7	328
Buckinghamshire	487.0	754	142.6	221	211.7	328
Surrey	650.7	629	223.6	216	202.3	196

1995–96

	SSA £ million	SSA/Head £	NNDR £ million	NNDR/Head £	RSG £ million	RSG/Head £
Humberside	674.5	763	206.9	234	325.7	368
Derbyshire	653.3	687	222.4	234	268.4	282
Buckinghamshire	453.9	698	139.9	215	185.5	285
Surrey	674.3	651	237.3	229	190.3	184

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage increase of grant-related expenditure assessment between 1984–85 and 1989–90 and in the standard spending assessment between 1989–90 and 1994–95 for *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(b)* the south-east; and to what factors he attributes the variation resulting from the formula of needs distribution.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 16 January 1995]:* The percentage increases in grant-related expenditure between 1984—85 and 1989–90 were 38.6 per cent. for the Yorkshire and Humberside region and 36.9 per cent. for the south east region including London.

Grant-related expenditure assessments and standard spending assessments are not fully comparable so comparisons between the GREA for 1989–90 and the SSA for 1994–95 are not given. The percentage increases in standard spending assessments between 1990–91 and 1994–95 were 27.7 per cent. for the Yorkshire and Humberside region and 29.7 per cent. for the south-east region, including London.

These variations are attributable to updating data, changing methodology and changing national aggregates. The figures quoted also make no adjustment for any changes in functions or responsibilities.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received, and from which local government organisations and authorities, *(a)* for and *(b)* against the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We have identified 76 recent representations from local government organisations and authorities about the area cost adjustment, and these are listed. A number of representations cannot be categorised conclusively as "for" or "against" the area cost adjustment, but the majority of representations from authorities outside London and the south east argue for abolishing or reducing the size of the area cost adjustment or making substantial changes to the methodology for its calculation.

Association of County Councils
Association of London Authorities
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
London Boroughs Association
Abbotskerwell parish council
Bedfordshire county council
Bedfordshire police authority
Berkshire county council
Bradford metropolitan borough council
Calderdale metropolitan borough council
Chelmsford district council
Christchurch district council
Cleveland county council
Copeland district council
Coventry city council
Cumbria county council
Derbyshire county council

Derbyshire police authority
Devon county council
Dudley metropolitan borough council
Durham county council
East Lindsey district council
East Midlands county councils
Gateshead metropolitan borough council
Gateshead metropolitan borough council (on behalf of the metropolitan authorities outside London)
Glanford district council
Hereford and Worcester county council
High Peak district council
Humberside county council
Isles of Scilly council
Isle of Wight council
Kent county council
Kirklees metropolitan borough council
Knowsley metropolitan borough council
Lancashire county council
Lincolnshire county council
Lincolnshire police authority
Liverpool city council
London borough of Brent
London borough of Ealing
London borough of Enfield
London borough of Havering
London borough of Hillingdon
London borough of Hounslow
London borough of Kingston upon Thames
London borough of Merton
London borough of Richmond upon Thames
London borough of Sutton
London borough of Westminster
Newark and Sherwood district council
Norfolk county council
North Yorkshire county council
Northamptonshire county council
Northamptonshire police authority
Northumberland county council
Nottinghamshire county council
Oxfordshire county council
Reading district council
Rushmoor district council
Sheffield city council
Shropshire county council
Slough borough council
Staffordshire county council
Stevenage district council
St. Helens metropolitan borough council
Suffolk county council
Surrey county council
Tameside metropolitan borough council
Tandridge district council
Thurrock district council
Tonbridge and Malling district council
Warwickshire county council
West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority
West Sussex county council
Wokingham district council
Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department plans to remedy inequities in the area cost adjustment.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government consider that the existing area cost adjustment is well justified, but remain willing to consider arguments for improvements in the way in which the standard spending assessments sallow for the higher costs in some parts of the country.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his assessment of the amount of transfer of grant to *(a)* London and *(b)* the south-east under the area cost adjustment for each year since it was introduced together with the comparative figures for Humberside, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The table shows the total contribution of the area cost adjustment to standard spending assessments for *(a)* London and *(b)* the rest of the south-east, for each year since SSAs were first introduced in 1990–91. The area cost adjustment is not applied to shire counties outside the south-east.

Contribution of area cost adjustment to SSAs (£ million)

Year	*London*	*Area of the receiver for the Metropolitan Police*	*South-east (outside London)*
1990–91	562.2	—	274.0
1991–92	778.0	—	373.5
1992–93	855.0	—	458.8
1993–94	842.7	—	489.0
1994–95	960.1	—	575.6
1995–96 (proposed)	1002.8	116.1	556.7

Note:
The area of the Receiver for the Metropolitan police excludes the City of London and includes parts of the south-east outside London. Before 1995–96, the SSA for the receiver was based on his budget, as approved by the Home Secretary, which included those extra costs which, from 1995–96, are reflected in the area cost adjustment.

Air Pollution

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals to tackle severe air pollution including winter smog.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State yesterday published a statement of the Government's strategic policies for improving air quality. Proposals on action during air quality episodes, including provision of information to the public, will be published later this year.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to consult with organisations of, and representing, people with disabilities over any restrictions on vehicular use of city centre streets in periods of high air pollution.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government's strategic policies for managing air quality are set out in "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge", published by the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland, for Wales, for Northern Ireland, and for Transport on 19 January 1995. Those policies are aimed at delivering sustainable improvements in air quality, thereby reducing the risk of episodes of high pollution and possible need for restrictions on vehicular use in such circumstance. It will be the Government's policy to ensure that should such restrictions nevertheless be contemplated, there is appropriate consultation with relevant interests, including people with disabilities.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the successful bids for single regeneration budget funding in London, giving in each case the total amount allocated in each financial year and its breakdown between each district expenditure programme within the single regeneration budget.

Mr. Curry: The proposed funding from the single regeneration budget for the successful bids in London, subject to the finalisation of delivery plans and funding agreements and the availability of resources, is given the table.

No allocation can be made between expenditure programmes that make up the single regeneration budget; the new arrangements are designed to provide flexible support for sustainable regeneration, economic development and industrial competitiveness in a way which meets local needs and priorities. It is therefore not possible to identify how funding of successful SRB bids relates to existing programmes that now form part of the SRB.

Single Regeneration Budget—Successful bids with amount allocated per year

Lead organisation and bid title	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
AZTEC *High Flyers*	313,000	312,000	311,000	—	—	—	—
AZTEC *Unlocking the Economic Potential of Young People*	540,000	850,000	850,000	850,000	850,000	850,000	851,088
CENTEC *Business 2000*	370,000	370,000	370,000	—	—	—	—
CENTEC *Business Education Alliance*	122,000	225,000	225,000	225,000	225,000	225,000	224,500
CENTEC *Off the Streets and Into Work*	555,200	496,800	522,400	461,600	—	—	—
City and Inner London North TEC *Contributing to a World Class City*	1,042,400	1,184,675	1,184,675	1,184,675	1,184,675	1,184,675	1,184,675
Hackney 2000 Partnership *Building on our Strengths*	1,450,000	2,800,000	3,890,000	3,890,000	3,890,000	3,890,000	5,486,737
London Borough Barking and Dagenham *Roding Valley Area Regeneration*	235,000	320,000	145,000	10,000	10,000	—	—
London Borough Brent *Chalkhill Estate: Economic and Physical Regeneration*	541,000	619,000	947,000	377,000	766,000	—	—
London Borough Brent *Crime Reduction, Employment and Training Programme*	674,670	1,025,450	622,010	549,000	546,000	—	—
London Borough Brent Department of Education *Brent Reading Recovery*	150,000	125,000	100,000	75,000	50,000	—	—
London Borough Greenwich *Greenwich Regeneration: Woolwich Revival*	2,750,000	5,574,000	5,579,000	4,186,000	3,107,000	1,828,000	1,828,000
London Borough Harrow *Ethnic Minority Business Development*	79,150	88,595	103,460	—	—	—	—
London Borough Hounslow *Bid for Brentford*	2,400,000	5,000,000	4,000,000	1,200,000	1,000,000	—	—
London Borough Hounslow *Children's Service Training Centre*	143,000	31,000	14,000	—	—	—	—
London Borough Lambeth *Riverside South*	390,000	1,555,000	1,566,00	1,148,000	180,000	190,000	160,000

Single Regeneration Budget—Successful bids with amount allocated per year

Lead organisation and bid title	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
London Borough Lewisham *Silwood Estate: Combating Racial Harassment*	113,908	81,508	53,208	—	—	—	—
London Borough Merton *Wandle Strategy for Regeneration*	750,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	—	—	—	—
London Borough Newham *Green Street Regeneration*	700,000	1,444,000	1,360,000	1,458,000	942,000	811,000	869,000
London Borough Newham *Meeting the needs of Newham's Communities*	700,000	700,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
London Borough Southwark *Cross River Partnership*	80,000	225,000	563,000	1,025,000	750,000	0	0
London Borough Southwark *Peckham Partnership*	3,564,000	11,257,000	10,340,000	10,740,000	10,740,000	8,915,000	4,390,000
London Borough Sutton *Sutton Regeneration Partnership*	150,000	693,930	621,920	413,000	323,000	329,000	284,000
London Borough Hamlets *Stepney Revitalisation Bid*	2,705,000	2,700,000	4,600,000	4,600,000	4,600,000	4,600,000	4,600,000
London Borough Wandsworth *Wandsworth Partnership*	310,000	1,303,000	1,303,000	—	—	—	—
London Boroughs Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Newham *East Thames Side Partnership*	1,335,000	1,345,000	2,775,000	3,580,000	3,983,000	300,000	300,000
LETEC *ASSIST: Business Development Support*	277,000	277,000	277,000	0	0	0	—
LETEC *Higher Level Skills Enhancement Initiative*	250,000	377,000	377,000	377,000	377,000	377,000	376,750
LETEC *Language Support in East London*	60,000	70,000	80,000	85,800	85,800	85,800	85,800
LETEC *Raising the Skill Base in East London*	314,000	349,000	349,000	349,000	349,000	349,000	348,200
Lewisham Enterprise Consortium *Into the Mainstream*	125,000	125,000	0	—	—	—	—
London First and Groundwork in London *Action for London's Environment*	120,000	400,000	400,000	0	0	—	—
NLTEC *Support for New Businesses*	600,000	600,000	600,000	—	—	—	—
NLTEC *Upper Lee Valley Partnership*	5,000,000	6,300,000	6,300,000	6,500,000	5,800,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
NWLTEC *Brent and Harrow SRB Bid*	573,000	519,000	469,000	—	—	—	—
Park Royal Partnership Ltd. *Development Park Royal's Offer*	2,237,000	2,645,000	1,635,000	735,000	605,000	435,000	325,000

Single Regeneration Budget—Successful bids with amount allocated per year

Lead organisation and bid title	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Soho Housing Association *Salter's City Foyer*	300,000	120,000	80,000	80,000	80,000	80,000	80,000
SOLOTEC *Building Education Business Links*	272,000	285,250	285,250	285,250	285,250	—	—
SOLOTEC *Credit Accumulation and Transfer System for London*	170,000	63,000	17,000	—	—	—	—
SOLOTEC *New Business Growth*	650,000	650,000	650,000	—	—	—	—
South Bank Employers Group *South Bank Environmental Improvements Project*	1,100,000	1,000,000	—	—	—	—	—
Stratford Development Partnership Ltd. *New Dimensions for Stratford and Temple Mills*	800,000	2,100,000	2,100,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000
STTEC *Education and Guidance*	223,000	344,500	344,500	344,500	344,500	344,500	344,500
STTEC *Self employment for the disadvantaged*	250,000	200,000	200,000	—	—	—	—
The Bloomsbury Project Board *Bloomsbury Project*	125,000	225,000	225,000	225,000	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets College *Raising Participation: Raising Achievement*	100,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	50,000
WLTEC *Centre for Manufacturing and Engineering Innovation*	150,000	100,000	—	—	—	—	—
WLTEC *Economic Development for New Businesses, West London*	500,000	500,000	500,000	—	—	—	—
WLTEC *Education—Business Partnerships in West London*	225,000	225,000	220,000	185,000	170,000	150,000	105,000

Home Ownership

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many self-employed householders were owner-occupiers in the years 1979, 1985 and 1994.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The estimates available are:

	Million	[1]*Per cent.*
1977–78	1.00	11
1985	1.33	12
1993–94	1.81	13

[1] As a proportion of all owner occupiers.

These figures are taken from the national dwelling and housing survey for the earliest estimate, the 1985 labour force survey and the 1993–94 survey of English housing, and are subject to sampling error.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the state of the United Kingdom housing industry; and if he will indicate those steps he is taking which specifically promote home ownership.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Total housing starts in the United Kingdom in the first nine months of 1994 were 10 per cent. higher than in the same period in 1993. Private housing starts were up 13 per cent. The number of starts in 1994 will be the highest since 1989 for both the private sector and in total. We are continuing to promote home ownership through a range of policies including the right to buy, cash incentive schemes open to local authority and housing association tenants, and shared ownership schemes.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the introduction of a national energy efficiency programme and the environmental implication; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I receive many representations on every aspect of energy efficiency, including the numerous energy efficiency initiatives and programmes run by my Department's energy efficiency office.

Hereford and Worcester County Council

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total standard spending assessment of Hereford and Worcester county council in 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 and what it is for 1995–96; and within that total, what the standard spending assessment was for *(a)* education, *(b)* social services, *(c)* police authority and *(d)* fire services in each of these years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The figures requested are set out in the table. They have not been adjusted for changes of responsibility.

(£ million)

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	[1]*1995–96*
Education	241.880	[2]211.588	216.529	219.948
Personal social services	47.190	51.235	61.284	69.567
Police	26.580	28.318	29.448	[3]nil
Fire	11.831	12.116	12.378	11.672
Highway maintenance	25.462	25.114	24.968	24.870
Other services	21.480	21.679	23.236	22.811
Capital financing	22.620	22.515	20.194	17.772
Total SSA	397.044	372.565	388.036	366.640

Notes:
[1] 1995–96 figures are those in the proposed local government finance settlement 1995–96, announced by the Secretary of State on 1 December 1994.
[2] Responsibility for most further education was transferred out of local government from 1 April 1993.
[3] SSA for police is allocated direct to West Mercia police authority from 1 April 1995. The police authority receives a police SSA of £48.466 million and a total SSA of £49.339 million.

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the level of standard spending assessment per head of population for all local authorities for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am placing in the Library a table which provides the information requested using the proposed standard spending assessment figures for 1995–96, as announced by the Secretary of State on 1 December 1994.

Assembly of European Regions

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Assembly of European Regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has no record of representations from this organisation.

Electricity-generating Domestic Waste Incineration Plants

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current number and capacity of electricity-generating domestic waste incineration plants in the United Kingdom; and what estimate he has made of the future number and capacity of such plants.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave him on 19 January, *Official Report*, column *591*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Peace Talks

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress of the peace talks.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on 19 January, *Official Report*, column 835.

Fair Employment

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to reform the Fair Employment Act 1989.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) on 19 January, *Official Report*, column *607*.

Youth Service

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what calculations he has made of the changes in levels of funding for the youth service in Northern Ireland since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: Recurrent funding for the youth service in Northern Ireland has risen from £9.3 million in 1989–90 to £15 million in 1993–94, the last year for which complete figures are available. This represents a 61.3 per cent. increase in total recurrent funding over that period. An increase of 62 per cent. in capital funding—from £1.1 million to almost £1.8 million—has also occurred over the same period.

Milk Marketing Board

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decision has been made on the reorganisation scheme submitted by the milk marketing board for Northern Ireland

Mr. Ancram: The Agriculture (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 provided for the ending of the statutory milk marketing scheme in Northern Ireland. It enabled the milk marketing board for Northern Ireland to submit proposals for its replacement by voluntary arrangements, for the transfer of its assets to specified successor bodies and for the distribution of the value of those assets to milk producers.

The milk marketing board for Northern Ireland submitted reorganisation proposals to the Department of Agriculture on 31 December 1993. Following this, a wide-ranging consultation exercise was conducted when the views of the various parties with an interest were sought. Subsequently, and in the light of the responses to that consultation, the milk marketing board on 26 August 1994 submitted an amended reorganisation scheme and a further round of consultation was conducted.

In his statement of 21 December 1994, my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State commented on the milk marketing board's proposals. He said that those reorganisation proposals met the requirements of the Agriculture (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 and that subject to and contingent upon approval being given by the EC under articles 92 and 93 of the EC treaty in respect of the state aids inherent in the scheme; certain amendments being made to the scheme; and satisfactory arrangements being put in place to cover any liability upon the residuary board in respect of milk quota superlevy; the scheme submitted by the board was one that merits approval.

The milk marketing board has now submitted the formal amendments to its scheme, as required in my right hon. and learned Friend's statement, together with the necessary assurances in relation to payment of any milk quota superlevy. Formal state aid approval by the European Commission has now been confirmed. The scheme has therefore today been approved in accordance with the requirements of the Agriculture (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

The order requires that the principles of the approved reorganisation scheme be made public. The principles of the scheme as submitted, and subsequently amended, by the milk marketing board for Northern Ireland were set out in the two consultation documents issued by the Department of Agriculture in January and September 1994. Although some further detailed amendments have been made by the milk marketing board to its scheme, the principles as set out in those documents are unchanged. Copies of the consultation documents, together with a note updating them in the light of the further detailed amendments, are available from the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland.

Under the approved reorganisation scheme, the existing statutory milk marketing scheme will be revoked on 1 March 1995—the "vesting date". As a result, producers will be free to sell their milk to whom they wish, whether to the successor co-operative being established under the board's reorganisation scheme, to agricultural co-operatives or other group marketing milk on behalf of producers, or direct to processors. The current joint committee system of centrally negotiated pricing according to the milk's ultimate end use will end on the vesting date. The price of milk will be determined by contract between purchaser and supplier.

The milk marketing board for Northern Ireland will be succeeded by a producer co-operative, United Diary Farmers Ltd. and the board's commercial division, Dromona Quality Foods, will be incorporated as wholly owned subsidiary of United. The assets being transferred to United have been set at £18.003 million. Eligible producers who join United will receive shares in United proportionate to their milk production in 1992–93. Eligible producers who elect not to join United will receive redeemable loanstock bearing an interest rate at bank base rate plus a 0.5 per cent. premium. Loan stock will be allocated on the same basis as shares to joiners of United and will be redeemed not later than five years after the vesting date.

In view of the delay in the vesting date from 1 April 1994, as first proposed, to 1 March 1995, the milk marketing board has written to all milk producers who have already signed a contract with United to provide them with an opportunity to withdraw without penalty from that contract.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Civil Servants

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many staff in his Department have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993 as required under the civil service management code; and how many of those reports were followed by an application to join the company concerned.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 18 January 1995]:* Information on offers of outside employment to staff below grade 3 level is not recorded centrally in this Department. No members of staff at grade 3 level or above within the Department of National Heritage have reported an offer of employment from an outside employer since February 1993.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Veal

Mr. Morley: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what was the country of origin of the veal served in the House of Commons on 17 January; and what method of production was used.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The Director of Catering Services informs me that the veal used in the Refreshment Department is purchase only from United Kingdom suppliers who use the Quantock method of rearing veal calves.

Kiosk Takings

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what were the takings of the House of Commons kiosk in *(a)* the four weeks to 24 December

and *(b)* the latest financial year for which figures are complete; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: I am assuming that my hon. Friend is referring to the main kiosk.

The unaudited figures for December 1994 indicate that the takings of the main kiosk for the four weeks to 24 December 1994 were some £200,000, inclusive of VAT.

The accounts of the Refreshment Department trading fund account for the year ending 31 March 1994 show that the kiosks had a turnover of £674,966, net of VAT. The Director of Catering Services informs me that the turnover of the main kiosk was £521,082, net of VAT.

No. 7 Millbank

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee who are the beneficial owners of, or of the company which owns, the freehold of No. 7 Millbank; and if he will arrange for a copy of the lease to be deposited in the Library.

Mr. Ray Powell: The company which owns No. 7 Millbank is Salinger Properties Ltd. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, it is not the practice to deposit copies of leases in the Library.

WALES

NHS Trust Salary Bills

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many managers are employed by each of the health trusts in *(a)* Clwyd, *(b)* Gwynedd and *(c)* Powys; what is the estimated annual salary bill for each; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: The available information is given in the following table. It is not yet possible to distinguish between clinicians and non-clinicians in management grades. The figures cover both. The two trusts in Gwynedd and the North Wales ambulance trust, covering Clwyd and Gwynedd ambulance services, were not established until 1 April 1994.

NHS Trust	*Managers (whole-time equivalents) September 1993*	*Salary bill September 1994*	*(£ thousands) 1993–94*
Clwydian Community Care	53	54	1,661
Glan Clwyd Hospital	27	29	745
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	27	30	966
Powys Health Care	37	37	887
Gwynedd Community Health	[1]—	23	[1]—
Gwynedd Hospital	[1]—	14	[1]—
North Wales Ambulance	[1]—	6	[1]—

[1] not appicable

Unemployment (Young People)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people in Wales who are currently under 18 years of age but who are not in *(a)* full-time education, *(b)* on a training programme or *(c)* in full-time work.

Mr. Redwood: The latest estimate available is based on the labour force survey conducted last summer. It indicates that, at that time, approximately 10,000, subject to confidence limits of plus or minus 4,000, 16 and 17-year-olds were neither in full-time education, nor on a training programme nor in full-time work. We can only honour our guarantee of a training place for those not in work where the young person asks for such a place.

Community Facilities

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has regarding the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres programme.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has administered the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres programme since 1978. The programme aims to assist local voluntary and community groups to repair existing facilities or to construct new premises. It is a collaborative scheme with project costs being shared by the Welsh Office, the local authority and the local sponsor. In recent years, the legislative power for the programme has derived from regulation 12 of the Education (Grant) Regulations 1990.

Since 1978, Welsh Office grants of nearly £6 million have helped fund some 618 local projects. Total provision in 1994–95 is £493,000.

It is our policy that decisions on the funding of local facilities should, wherever possible and appropriate, be taken by local authorities. I am therefore proposing that the programme should be wound up and the finance transferred to local authorities with effect from 31 March 1997. After that date, assistance to local youth, voluntary and community groups to repair existing facilities and to construct new premises will not normally be funded under these regulations.

This proposal does not affect projects which have already been approved under the programme, or those which have been submitted under the 1995–96 round and are currently under consideration.

Before taking a final decision on the proposal, I am consulting local authorities, voluntary groups and other bodies. A copy of the consultation letter, which also includes the arrangements for financial transfer, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Tech'Atlantique

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the relevance of Tech'Atlantique for Wales in the European Union.

Mr. Richards: Tech'Atlantique is a recently established network of universities in those regions of the European Union which border the Atlantic ocean. As yet, no Welsh university has joined the network. It is therefore too soon to assess the relevance of the network to Wales.

Four Motor Regions

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to strengthen links between Wales and the four motor regions and nations of the European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: There is a programme of activity with the four motor regions. Collaboration covers a number of areas including business, research and development, healthcare, education, the environment and culture. A visit to Catalunya by Welsh applied scientists and an exchange of graduates between innovative companies in Wales and Baden-Württemberg are some of the new initiatives currently under consideration. In addition, the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) is to visit both Lombardy and Catalunya later this year.

National links with Europe are taken forward through the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union.

Local Council Corporate Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the application of the competitive tendering programme in respect of local councils' corporate services.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *879–80*, by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment.

Youth Service Funding

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what calculations he has made of the changes in levels of funding for the youth service in Wales since 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is for individual local councils to determine the priority that they give to youth activities when apportioning money between functions. Net current expenditure by local authorities for the years 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93, was £12.0 million, £13.3 million and £13.7 million respectively. Information is not available on a consistent basis for prior years and outturn data is not yet available for 1993-94.

Public Bodies (Running Costs)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the indicative management running costs he has agreed with each of the non-departmental public bodies he sponsors.

Mr. Redwood: I have asked the NDPBs sponsored by my Department to keep within the following running costs budgets in 1995–96:

	£ million
Housing for Wales	2.87
Sports Council for Wales	1.039
Arts Council of Wales	1.719
Further Education Funding Council	2.558
Higher Education Funding Council	1.679
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	4.101
Land Authority for Wales	1.882
National Museum of Wales	10.452
National Library of Wales	4.523
Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments	1.18
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	0.985
Wales Youth Agency	0.386
Welsh Language Board	1.123
ACAC	1.65
Wales Tourist Board	4.150
Welsh Development Agency	13.2
Development Board for Rural Wales	3.689
Countryside Council for Wales	8.1

Imax Cinema

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the chairman of the council of the national museum of Wales and the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation for Wales with respect to the funding of the proposed Imax cinema and the redevelopment of the Welsh industrial and maritime museum; on what date consent for capital expenditure on *(a)* the Imax cinema equipment and *(b)* the cinema building was granted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *814*, I have received no further representations from either the president of the council of the national museum of Wales or the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a further statement on the forms of direct accountability of NHS trusts to *(a)* the Welsh Office, *(b)* health authorities and *(c)* GP fundholders.

Mr. Redwood: NHS trusts, in Wales, enter into accountability agreements which outline the relationship and respective responsibilities between myself, the director for the Welsh Office Health Department, as accounting officer, and the trust chairmen and their chief executive officers. The prime duty is to provide good quality health care for the people of Wales.

The financial obligations that trusts must meet are to break even, taking one year with another, make a target return—currently 6 per cent.—and stay within the annually established external financing limit.

Trusts are also required to publish annual reports and audited accounts and to hold at least one meeting a year open to the public.

Trusts are directly accountable to health authorities and GP fundholders through service contracts to agreed levels of quality, quantity and price.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what undertakings have been *(a)* sought and *(b)* given with regard to the continuity of employment for the chief executive-designate newly appointed by the University hospital of Wales—Cardiff Royal Infirmary trust designate subsequent to, and conditional upon, the formation of that NHS trust and his appointment of a chairman and board for it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None. South Glamorgan health authority as the employer has offered a contract to the chief executive designate of the University Hospital of Wales—Cardiff Royal Infirmary group. If the application for trust status is approved, the trust will be required to consider and approve the appointment of a chief executive.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the levels of borrowings of NHS trusts in Wales, *(a)* for capital developments and *(b)* for other purposes in each financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave on 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *347*.

Blood Transfusion Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when a decision will be taken on the future host organisation and format for the national blood transfusion service Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The future management arrangements of the Welsh blood service will be subject to consultation. The consultation period is scheduled to commence in January 1995 and be completed by end February 1995 and an announcement on the result will follow shortly thereafter.

Lobbying Organisations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what occasions he or his fellow Welsh Office ministers or officials have met representatives of lobbying organisations.

Mr. Redwood: I and my Ministers meet Members of Parliament who may bring in delegations to see us. If Members chose to bring in lobbying organisations as part of those delegations, we would not refuse to see them. We do not see lobbying organisations on their own. Officials frequently meet representatives from a wide range of bodies.

Residuary Body for Wales

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he has made for the establishment of the residuary body for Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The residuary body will be set up on 1 February. The members will be:

Mr. D. Hugh Thomas CBE (chairman)
Mr. J. Elwyn Davies
Miss D. Adrianne Jones CBE
Mr. Brian T. Williams

The Secretary of State will be issuing guidance to the residuary body. Local authorities will be able to comment on a draft of the guidance before it is issued in final form to the residuary body.

SCOTLAND

Barnacle Geese

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the implications for the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 of the recent acquittal in Dumfries sheriff court of a farmer for the shooting of barnacle geese without a licence.

Sir Hector Monro: None.

EDUCATION

Student Loans Company

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what means of redress a student has against any malfunctioning of the Student Loans Company that affects his or her financial or educational position.

Mr. Boswell: As indicated in the charter for higher education, a student who has a complaint against the Student Loans Company should, in the first instance, contact the company. If he is not satisfied with the company's response, or more than three months has elapsed since the complaint was made, the borrower can ask the company to refer his complaint to the independent assessor appointed in accordance with the Student Loans Act 1990. A copy of the assessor's terms of reference was placed in the Library of the House on 19 July 1990.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what plans she has to hold a public inquiry into the functioning of the Student Loans Company;

(2) what assessment she has made as to the extent to which the Student Loans Company is honouring its promises on quality of service to students;

(3) what assessment she has made as to the quality of service being offered by the Student Loans Company; and what plans she has to improve its performance.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has no plans to hold a public inquiry. I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *340–41*.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether the staff of the Student Loans Company are on performance-related pay; and what has happened to pay levels over the past three years.

Mr. Boswell: The pay of staff of the Student Loans Company is performance related. Pay increases for individuals are a matter for the company. For 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 they were settled within overall totals of 4.42 per cent., 1.48 per cent. and 2.49 per cent., respectively.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated cost of the investigation being carried out by Coopers and Lybrand into allegations concerning the Student Loans Company.

Mr. Boswell: Coopers and Lybrand was appointed to undertake the investigation, following competitive tender action. Its bid represented the best value for money in relation to the competition.

The individual value of contracts between the Department and its suppliers is considered to be commercial in confidence and cannot therefore be disclosed.

Youth Service (Funding)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what calculations she has made of the changes in levels of funding for the youth service in England since 1989; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: It is for local authorities to decide how much of their budget they dedicate to expenditure on the youth service.

Local education authorities' net recurrent expenditure on the youth service, as recorded in returns to the Department of Environment, between 1989–90 and 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available, was as follows:

Year	Net recurrent expenditure (actual) £ million
1989–90	235.3
1990–91	241.7
1991–92	251.7
1992–93	273.9

Schools (Capital Programme)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current estimate of outstanding capital works in schools in each local education authority and for England as a whole.

Mr. Robin Squire: Such information is not held centrally for individual LEAs. For England as a whole, information from the 1991 National Audit Office report on school buildings suggested that some £2 billion, at 1990 prices, was required to deal with the outstanding capital needs of school buildings. In the four years from 1991–92, Government support for capital and repair work at maintained schools has amounted to some £2.5 billion and a further £620 million will be available in 1995–96.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what capital grants have been given *(a)* to each grant-maintained school and *(b)* to local education authority schools in each year since 1990.

Mr. Robin Squire: Allocations to individual schools are the responsibility of their LEAs or the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member in respect of allocations to individual grant-maintained schools.

Clerical Support

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much money was spent in each of the last five years on clerical support for teachers in schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table gives local education authorities' expenditure on administrative and clerical staff, and education support staff in LEA-maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools, from 1988–89 to 1992–93, the latest year for which figures are available.

Year	Expenditure	
	£ million, cash	£ million 1994–95 prices
1988–89	598.6	803.5
1989–90	723.4	907.7
1990–91	842.8	979.1
1991–92	989.8	1,081.9
1992–93	1,081.9	1,137.3

Public Bodies

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for how many boards, authorities, committees and other public bodies she is responsible, in the whole or in part, for appointments; what is the total number of such appointments; and what is the total public spending by the bodies.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend is responsible, in whole or in part, for 385 appointments to 28 boards, authorities, committees and other public bodies. Total public spending by these bodies in 1994–95 is estimated at some £6.6 billion.

Pre-School Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pre-school education places were available in England at the latest available date; and what percentage that number is of the total number of children in the relevant age group.

Mr. Forth: Information on the number of education places is not available. In January 1994, there were 675,000 pupils below compulsory school age in maintained nursery and primary schools in England, of whom 347,000 were in nursery provision. The participation rates were 52 per cent. and 27 per cent. respectively.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which elements of gross income and allowed expenditure are discounted in order to reach the figure for assessment purposes in respect of the amount of parental contribution to fees to be paid in the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Robin Squire: As a general principle, parents must declare their gross annual income from all sources for the purpose of assessment under the assisted places scheme. Non-taxable social security benefits are excluded from the assessment of parents' relevant income. For self-employed persons, deductions from the gross profit amount agreed with HM inspector of taxes may be made only in respect of capital allowances, losses and stock relief. In all cases, an allowance—£1,140 in the current academic year, 1994–95—is made for each child, other than the assisted place holder, or other dependent relative in the household. This reduces the relevant income figure and helps larger families in particular. The only other allowance which is discounted from gross income is the blind person's allowance.

Student Finance

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the Government are doing to assist students in further education who do not wish to fall into debt through student loans and yet are unable to exist on student grants.

Mr. Boswell: Student loans are not available for further education. It is Government policy to provide support for students in higher education through grant and student loan. Loans are provided on generous terms. It is for individual students to decide whether or not to take out their loan entitlement.

School Closures

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools have been closed in each of the last five years.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 17 January 1995]:* The table lists, by the year in which the closure was proposed to take effect, the number of approved school closure proposals. In some instances, the actual date of implementation may have been modified from that originally proposed.

Year proposed for closure	Number of schools
1990	322
1991	310
1992	437
1993	224
1994	103

Pupil Testing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her policy on the body administering standard assessment tasks using unqualified student teachers to do the marking; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The recruitment of qualified markers to mark the national curriculum tests for 11 and 14-year-olds this year is going very well. No unqualified student teachers will be employed to do the marking.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how she will prevent the standard assessment task results for 11-year-olds available in June being used by parents for school selection; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend cannot do, and would not want to do, what the hon. Member has suggested. The national curriculum testing and assessment arrangements are intended to raise standards and to promote accountability. My right hon. Friend intends to require schools to publish, in their annual reports and prospectuses, their pupils' aggregate results in the national curriculum assessments and tests for 11-year-olds. This will provide clear and robust information about schools' performance which parents may take in account, alongside other information about schools, when deciding to which school they should apply.

My right hon. Friend has, however, made it clear that the results of national curriculum tests and assessments will not be included in national school by school performance tables in 1995.

EMPLOYMENT

Community Action

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have entered community action and how many were participating in community action in each month since the start of the programme in each region and for Great Britain; what information he has about the destination of those participants who have left community action; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 20 January 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question about the number of men and women who have participated in Community Action in each month since the programme began and the destination of Community Action leavers.

Since the programme began on 27 July 1993 to 30 December 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, 45,588 men and 11,647 women have started on Community Action.

The number of men and women who were participating in Community Action in each month since the programme began, in each Employment Service region and for Great Britain are contained in the attached tables. There are separate tables for the 1993/4 and 1994/5 operational years for ease of reference.

Information is gathered on the destination of all Community Action leavers immediately on leaving and also through a postal follow up survey three months after leaving.

From April to the end of December this year 30,010 men and 7,673 women had left the programme. Of these 10 per cent. of men and 13 per cent. of women directly entered employment a further 14 per cent. of men and 16 per cent. of women went directly into training or full time education.

Three month follow up data shows that 15 per cent. of male leavers and 20 per cent. of female leavers are in employment at that stage, and 11 per cent. of male and 13 per cent. of female leavers are in training or full time education. This is at the top end of the target range for positive outcomes from the programme.

I hope this is helpful.

Table 1: Male community action participants each month, by region—1993–94

	July	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Northern	—	—	—	32	66	112	211	458	1,317
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	—	—	59	240	397	653	1,047	1,464
East Midlands and Eastern	—	—	15	103	297	435	576	849	1,192
London and South East	—	22	85	260	607	1,095	2,042	3,676	5,507
South West	35	74	93	221	422	595	777	1,081	1,482
Wales	—	—	9	69	153	255	383	572	827
West Midlands	—	—	4	38	146	251	419	682	1,707
North West	—	—	39	212	421	571	842	1,282	1,889
Scotland	—	—	12	84	216	350	496	1,030	1,600
Great Britain	35	96	257	1,078	2,568	4,061	6,390	10,677	16,985

Table 2: Female community action participants each month—by region—1993–94

	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March
Northern	—	—	—	2	4	10	22	66	210
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	—	—	17	60	87	139	206	308
East Midlands and Eastern	—	—	7	18	61	93	145	202	319
London and South East	—	—	4	59	145	246	500	972	1540
South West	1	9	12	29	64	100	160	221	304
Wales	—	—	2	15	47	78	105	143	225
West Midlands	—	—	1	18	49	84	131	186	442
North West	—	—		25	64	92	152	237	353
Scotland	—	—	10	29	51	80	119	275	394
Great Britain	1	9	36	212	545	870	1,473	2,508	4,095

Table 3: Male community action participants each month—by region—1994–95

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Northern	1,667	1,636	1,575	1,458	1,257	1,022	610	667	712
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,919	2,003	1,860	1,851	1,684	1,604	1,333	1,328	1,296
East Midlands and Eastern	1,553	1,524	1,428	1,423	1,246	1,242	1,174	1,238	1,342
London and South East	6,343	6,002	5,883	6,097	5,809	5,750	4,969	5,140	5,125
South West	1,724	1,693	1,616	1,593	1,448	1,402	1,271	1,288	1,301
Wales	968	909	803	693	638	646	537	567	574
West Midlands	2,434	2,252	2,000	1,768	1,400	1,348	997	1,013	1,076
North West	2,564	2,297	2,341	2,288	2,049	2,038	1,803	1,781	1,764
Scotland	1,992	1,958	1,912	1,748	1,577	1,480	1,272	1,375	1,409
Great Britain	21,164	20,274	19,418	18,919	17,108	16,532	13,943	14,407	14,599

Table 4: Female community action participants each month—by region—1994–95

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Northern	277	277	271	251	237	174	129	128	135
Yorkshire and Humberside	428	462	445	453	418	379	342	324	304
East Midlands and Eastern	383	385	372	364	335	336	322	342	378
London and South East	1,865	1,875	1,867	1,940	1,910	1,858	1,622	1,687	1,640
South West	368	382	381	389	377	360	332	343	353
Wales	274	267	217	206	183	207	174	169	160
West Midlands	991	704	653	573	462	411	313	309	323
North West	460	472	474	475	399	379	338	375	358
Scotland	450	461	436	399	366	343	292	313	333
Great Britain	5,196	5,285	5,116	5,050	4,687	4,447	3,864	3,993	3,984

Careers Services Contracts

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the name of the organisation which has been awarded the contract for careers services for each local authority.

Mr. Paice: Information on organisations tendering to provide careers services is commercial in confidence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce those organisations with which he will contract when negotiations are finalised.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline the timetable and the procedures used for the allocation of the careers service contract for the Solihull area.

Mr. Paice: All bids were assessed against the criteria published in the careers service prospectus. In Solihull, the Department is negotiating with two bidders to determine which offers the best careers service for Solihull and the best value for money for the taxpayer. Both bidders have until 3 February to respond with revised proposals.

FOCUS Computer System

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library the full FOCUS business case.

Mr. Oppenheim: The FOCUS business case is a working document prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for internal use to support the introduction of the FOCUS computer system and not for publication.

Trades Union Rights

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to introduce legislation giving effect to the decision of the European Court of Justice regarding trades union rights in respect of collective redundancy and transfer of undertakings.

Mr. Oppenheim: The relevant legislation on all but one of the points covered by the judgments was amended by the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993. The Government are presently considering what action needs to be taken on the remaining issue, concerning consultation with employees' representatives where there are no recognised trade unions.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the average weekly earnings inclusive of gross pay and exclusive of overtime for full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* the regions of Scotland including and excluding Grampian and *(c)* Great Britain for (i) male manual workers, (ii) male non-manual workers, (iii) all male workers, (iv) female manual workers, (v) female non-manual workers, (vi) all female workers and (vii) all workers;

(2) if he will show *(a)* average weekly earnings, *(b)* weekly median earnings, *(c)* the percentage of workers earning below (i) £208.53 per week and (ii) £156.40 per week and *(d)* the distribution of earnings for those earning (1) under the point below which 10 per cent. of earners fall and (2) the point which 10 per cent. of earners exceed, for Scotland including and excluding Grampian, broken down by (x) manual, (y) non-manual and (z) all workers;

(3) if he will list the percentage of full-time workers earning less than *(a)* £221.50, *(b)* £208.53 and *(c)* £156.40 per week inclusive of gross pay and excluding overtime in (i) Great Britain, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the regions of Scotland excluding and including Grampian for (1) male workers, (2) female workers, (3) male manual workers, (4) male non-manual workers and (5) all workers;

(4) if he will list the proportion of full-time workers with hourly earnings inclusive of gross pay but exclusive of overtime below *(a)* £5.88, *(b)* £5.53, *(c)* £4.15 and *(d)* £3.00 in (i) Great Britain, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the regions of Scotland exclusive and inclusive of Grampian for (1) male workers, (2) female workers, (3) manual workers, (4) non-manual workers and (5) all workers.

Mr. Oppenheim: As the information is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy in the Library.

European Commission Jobs

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will apply for derogation for Britain in respect of European Commission staff regulations regarding European Commission jobs in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: No. I have no plans to make a statement.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the precedence between the European Commission's staff regulations and the Race Relations Act 1974 in respect of European Commission jobs in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the consistency of EC staff regulations with the United Kingdom Race Relations Act 1974 in respect of non-EU nationals applying for jobs with the European Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: The EC staff regulations are directly applicable in all member states, including the UK. I have no plans to make a statement.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money is owed to training providers in the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford and the London borough of Lewisham by the South Thames TEC.

Mr. Paice: This is a matter for the administrative receiver.

TRANSPORT

Air Pollution

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to consult organisations of and representing people with disabilities, over any proposed restrictions on vehicular use of city centre streets in periods of high air pollution.

Mr. Norris: The Department of Transport is in close and regular touch with organisations of and for disabled people through its statutory advisory body, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee. Members of that committee are consulted as a matter of course on all issues which may affect the interests of disabled people. I fully understand the vital importance of personal mobility to many disabled people and the necessity of ensuring that it is not compromised.

Vehicle Licensing System

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to introduce the order in respect of the change to a continuous operating licence system for heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles.

Mr. Norris: I expect the commencement order for the provisions concerning operator licensing contained within the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to be made this summer. It is likely that those provisions will be brought into force at the end of the year.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Accidents)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents involving heavy goods vehicles there were in each of the last five years for which figures are available by police authority; and how many fatalities and serious injuries there were in each case.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Personal injury road accidents involving an HGV, by year, police authority: Great Britain 1989–1993

	Accidents				
Police Authority	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Metropolitan Police	1,733	1,684	1,302	1,169	1,195
Cumbria	165	176	154	156	159
Lancashire	220	281	213	237	281
Merseyside	255	292	283	286	281
Greater Manchester	702	667	606	573	619
Cheshire	475	403	364	339	418
Northumbria	249	255	232	184	212
Durham	112	124	120	113	118
North Yorkshire	403	347	351	312	292
West Yorkshire	464	454	499	441	453
South Yorkshire	308	292	286	269	255
Humberside	219	232	214	261	230
Cleveland	91	69	87	66	63
West Midlands	495	479	407	421	414
Staffordshire	327	355	368	363	358
West Mercia	382	366	329	290	257
Warwickshire	247	225	176	172	191
Derbyshire	316	303	277	280	256
Nottinghamshire	320	283	289	267	259
Lincolnshire	278	287	219	245	246
Leicestershire	311	315	294	269	281
Northamptonshire	331	291	263	228	218
Cambridgeshire	376	327	281	272	264
Norfolk	322	255	260	276	227
Suffolk	234	190	159	166	160
Bedfordshire	252	196	157	146	165
Hertfordshire	317	268	233	210	287
Essex	621	471	427	418	456
Thames Valley	624	517	528	508	529
Hampshire	474	440	387	362	370
Surrey	320	306	233	224	224
Kent	477	456	375	436	429
Sussex	357	321	294	283	293
City of London[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	365	344	289	259	293
Avon and Somerset	319	290	265	266	254
Gloucestershire	154	141	130	119	130
Wiltshire	212	211	187	193	260
Dorset	178	161	147	148	144
North Wales	210	196	212	182	159
Gwent	107	104	113	90	91
South Wales	212	228	216	225	197
Dyfed-Powys	168	207	206	197	168
Northern	78	83	43	62	60
Grampian	121	135	145	126	114
Tayside	134	133	113	105	115
Fife	68	50	52	52	47
Lothian and Borders	216	175	154	141	140
Central	79	47	58	56	50
Strathclyde	611	542	519	480	397
Dumfries and Galloway	98	89	100	73	94
Total	16,107	15,063	13,616	13,016	13,173

[1] Incorporated into the Metropolitan police figure.

Casualties in personal injury road accidents involving an HGV, by year, police authority and severity: Great Britain 1989–1993

	1989		*1990*		*1991*		*1992*		*1993*	
Police Authority	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Fatal*	*Serious*
Metropolitan Police	65	401	58	381	37	264	39	271	44	218
Cumbria	16	70	33	72	14	46	18	48	17	45
Lancashire	14	42	23	82	8	44	11	49	11	104
Merseyside	8	43	9	51	6	47	7	44	10	36
Greater Manchester	26	100	23	109	24	94	24	91	22	76
Cheshire	29	109	20	91	32	66	16	45	18	66
Northumbria	12	76	17	62	14	61	13	39	5	44
Durham	11	23	11	28	12	20	8	22	7	33
North Yorkshire	36	202	23	173	36	169	21	130	23	149
West Yorkshire	27	133	25	106	24	122	16	120	25	85
South Yorkshire	18	60	13	72	10	73	12	79	20	33

Casualties in personal injury road accidents involving an HGV, by year, police authority and severity: Great Britain 1989–1993

Police Authority	1989		1990		1991		1992		1993	
	Fatal	Serious	Fatal	Serious	Fatal	Serious	Fatal	Serious	Fatal	Serious
Humberside	11	69	11	56	11	56	19	68	15	81
Cleveland	0	14	1	7	8	10	2	12	0	12
West Midlands	21	142	35	125	14	102	23	102	12	91
Staffordshire	20	80	18	72	12	58	12	52	8	33
West Mercia	41	150	31	109	18	134	23	85	30	62
Warwickshire	26	104	3	76	7	81	16	70	22	62
Derbyshire	22	83	13	68	22	57	17	72	23	58
Nottinghamshire	15	114	22	87	21	70	12	74	9	71
Lincolnshire	22	88	39	103	16	77	20	90	18	79
Leicestershire	20	94	15	77	20	98	24	54	20	51
Northamptonshire	28	160	24	136	23	88	11	80	12	76
Cambridgeshire	23	125	30	120	18	104	15	86	10	88
Norfolk	24	122	17	106	15	114	22	98	18	79
Suffolk	21	86	9	65	6	64	9	61	10	66
Bedfordshire	15	63	12	44	8	27	20	31	15	26
Hertfordshire	10	79	17	75	11	81	8	62	11	85
Essex	24	160	28	107	28	97	21	102	17	100
Thames Valley	34	135	46	152	35	117	34	103	24	89
Hampshire	28	168	34	141	21	113	17	105	18	95
Surrey	10	85	13	77	11	44	4	43	5	46
Kent	34	113	17	108	21	65	27	98	22	113
Sussex	24	97	17	83	12	57	16	66	14	70
City of London[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall	20	145	11	111	11	100	13	83	17	77
Avon and Somerset	21	116	18	106	25	71	21	65	15	60
Gloucestershire	16	52	17	37	12	40	10	34	4	24
Wiltshire	16	50	14	70	15	48	18	54	14	73
Dorset	9	48	6	38	13	52	8	41	4	32
North Wales	17	63	10	40	18	52	4	50	12	30
Gwent	2	41	3	18	2	31	6	17	1	25
South Wales	4	49	9	49	5	28	9	36	7	21
Dyfed-Powys	10	83	17	107	13	92	11	82	9	82
Northern	15	39	7	38	8	20	5	30	7	33
Grampian	15	36	9	43	9	33	11	57	9	30
Tayside	29	71	7	70	13	69	11	48	9	60
Fife	5	28	5	18	2	15	2	16	4	8
Lothian and Borders	25	97	15	65	11	37	15	31	9	31
Central	6	30	5	18	3	25	3	16	3	15
Strathclyde	37	199	22	182	36	180	27	143	27	120
Dumfries and Galloway	7	43	3	37	11	32	11	32	13	55
Total	989	4,780	885	4,268	782	3,645	742	3,387	699	3,198

[1] Incorporated into the Metropolitan police figure.

Bus Services (Safety)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what meetings he *(a)* has held or *(b)* proposes to hold with organisations running public or private bus services to improve safety for passengers during late evening and night services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The primary responsibility for the safe operation of bus services rests with bus operators. It is in their commercial interest to ensure that services are safe and attractive for passengers.

The Department chairs a standing panel of representatives of bus operators, trade unions, the police and interested Government Departments, which meets to consider trends in assaults on bus crews and passengers and to recommend preventive measures. The Department is also commissioning a national review of transport-related crime, perceptions of safety and current preventive initiatives. This will include public and private bus companies.

British Rail

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of privatisation on British Rail's subsidiary, British Rail Telecom, and on the optic fibre it has already laid.

Mr. Watts: I have assessed the future of British Rail Telecommunications Ltd. in conjunction with the British Railways Board. Privatisation will best secure for the future the high-quality telecommunications links necessary for railway operations and will also provide opportunities for the company to exploit its significant cable, including optic fibre, network.

Austrian Tunnelling Method

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to what caused the Heathrow tunnel collapse in October; what part was played in this by the new Austrian tunnelling method; and what changes in plans for tunnelling at Heathrow and the new Jubilee line he is making as a result.

Mr. Norris: I understand from the British Airports Authority and the Health and Safety Executive that their

respective investigations into the Heathrow tunnel collapse in October are continuing. I have received no information on the specific causes of the collapse or the part played by the new Austrian tunnelling method. The HSE's eventual report will be published in due course.

Plans for carrying out tunnelling are primarily a matter for those carrying out the work. I understand that the HSE has published a discussion document to inform those proposing to restart NATM and has established a procedure for assessing any such proposals. London Underground is considering its construction plans for the Jubilee line extension, in the light of the HSE's recent decision that use of NATM can be recommenced for some of the project's tunnels. BAA is also considering its construction plans at Heathrow.

Disused Underground Stations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many disused Underground stations there are in London; if he will list them; and if he will make a statement about the arrangements for the safety of the public in respect of each of them.

Mr. Norris: The 22 disused Underground stations are as follows:

London Underground: Disused Stations
Aldwych
Blake Hall
British Museum
Brompton Road
Bull and Bush
Chancery Lane (old Central line station)
City Road
Down Street
Highgate (high level)
King William Street
King's Cross (old Metropolitan line station)
Lords
Mark Lane
Marlborough Road
North Weald
Ongar
Osterley (old Piccadilly line station)
South Kentish Town
St Mary's
Swiss Cottage (Metropolitan line station)
Wood Lane
York Road

I understand that London Underground has a variety of arrangements in place to ensure the safety of the public.

Public Transport

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what meetings he *(a)* has held or *(b)* proposes to hold with organisations running public transport systems in the United Kingdom to make the service more user-friendly.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet the chairman of London Transport and the British Railways Board to discuss a wide range of issues including measures to improve services for passengers. For bus services outside London, I have reconstituted the bus working group, which will include representatives from the Confederation of Passenger Transport, local authority associations and the National Federation of Bus Users to see what further measures can be taken to improve services within the deregulated framework.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the total costs to date of preparations for privatising the British Rail system; and what is his estimate of such costs over each of the next four years, including any cost of regulation.

Mr. Watts: Total costs of rail privatisation to date of the Department, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, and the Office of the Rail Regulator, are £48 million.

The costs of BR and Railtrack are primarily a matter for the industries themselves. However, we understand that their total costs to date are around £160 million.

Forward plans of expenditure by the Department, Opraf, and Orr for 1995–96 to 1997–98 will be published in the Transport Report 1995. Projected expenditure by BR and Railtrack is a matter for them.

Road Traffic (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last assessed the road traffic needs of Doncaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The review of the road programme announced on 30 March 1994 was the most recent review of the needs of the trunk road and motorway network, including that around Doncaster. The needs of the local road network are reviewed annually by Doncaster metropolitan borough council in its transport policies and programmes and the Secretary of State's decisions on that were announced on 15 December 1994.

Fire Service (Ships)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the additional demands made on the fire service by ships in United Kingdom coastal waters and ports *(a)* registered under the British flag and *(b)* registered under a flag of convenience; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: None. Incidents at sea requiring attendance or advice from the fire service are rare, although suitable arrangements are in place should this be necessary. There is no evidence of any relationship between the demand on the fire service caused by vessels on fire in UK waters and the vessels' flag state.

M1 Widening Schemes

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the time scale for making public the result of his internal reviewing respect of M1 widening schemes of *(a)* junctions 24 to 28 and *(b)* junctions 28 to 31.

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* There is no special review of these schemes. All schemes in the road programme are subject to appraisal at key stages in their development. The results of public consultations on the schemes for junctions 23A to 25 and 25 to 28 will be announced in due course. Options to put to the public are still being considered for the scheme for junctions 28 to 31.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

European Commission (Fines)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take following the fines levied by the European Commission on countries for allowing farmers to collect subsidies to which they were not entitled.

Mr. Jack: The financial penalties, or disallowances, imposed by the Commission's decision on the 1991 clearance of accounts will be collected from the member states concerned by automatic deductions from the monthly reimbursements of common agricultural policy expenditure. The UK has fared well, with disallowance of some £2 million compared to a total disallowance of £1.2 billion for all member states. It is important to note that disallowances are penalties imposed on member states for the failure to implement properly legislation relating to CAP scheme rules and controls.

While these deficiencies may result in farmers, or other recipients, being paid subsidies for which they are not eligible, this is by no means always the case. Some two thirds of the 1991 disallowance is on Italy and Spain for failure to implement milk quotas and exceeds the amounts received by those member states in respect of milk support. Where farmers are found to have overclaimed, it is the member state's responsibility to recover the money due and apply the appropriate penalties. Failure to do so would render them liable to disallowance.

We are keeping our own procedures under constant review. With regard to other member states, we are committed to ensuring that proper controls are in place, and that appropriate penalties are applied where this is not the case. We fully support a proposal currently on the table which, among other things, seeks to speed up the clearance of accounts process and improve the financial management of the CAP.

Fishing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the increase in Spanish vessels authorised by the Fisheries Councils on the existing balance stocks of fishing fleets to fish as required by section 1 sub-paragraph (ii) of the Fisheries Council statement.

Mr. Jack: Under the agreement reached at the December Fisheries Council, it is for each member state to inform the Commission, by the end of March this year, of the reference list of its named vessels which may have access to the various fisheries covered by the agreement, of the fishing effort assessed by the member state to be necessary to enable it to take up fully its fishing possibilities for total allowable catch and non-TAC species and, where the potential effort corresponding to free access for vessels in the reference list exceeds the assessed effort, the arrangements envisaged by the member state to regulate fishing effort. The Commission will make this information available to the other member states, and will then make a report and proposal to the Council, by 1 May, for the regulation of fishing effort. The Council shall decide on that proposal by 30 June. The agreement makes it clear that existing balances in exploitation by fishery and by zone are not to be disturbed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the effect of the swaps of haddock and cod agreed in the Fisheries Board agreement in Spain between *(a)* Spain and Belgium and *(b)* Spain and France on (i) establishing a Spanish track record and entitlement for areas where Spain has not fished before and (ii) the principle of relative stability in those areas.

Mr. Jack: Article 9 of the basic Council Regulation of the Common Fisheries Policy, 3760/92 provides that member states may, after notifying the Commission, exchange all or part of the fishing availabilities allocated to them. Such quota swaps are a regular part of the management of the CFP and are valuable in permitting the best use of fishing opportunities. The United Kingdom makes such swaps in the interest of and with the support of our fishing industry. Such swaps do not affect the relative stability shares on which the Council agrees quotas each year.

The swaps of haddock and cod apply in areas where Spain already fishes. Thus, they have no impact on track record or entitlement for areas where Spain has not fished before.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the consequences for the fishing industry of the United Kingdom failing to meet its commitment to reduce catching capacity by 1996 under the multi-annual guidance plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The targets for UK fleet reduction set out in Commission decision 92/593/EEC have since been made mandatory by Council decision 94/15/EEC. Council regulation (EEC) 3699/93 also provides that progress against targets may be taken into account in determining eligibility for certain types of structural assistance. It would be for the Commission in the first instance to consider what action might be appropriate in the event of the United Kingdom targets not being met.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what commitments the British Government have made under the current multi-annual guidance plan for reducing United Kingdom catching capacity by 1996.

Mr. Jack: Commission decision 92/593 of 21 December 1992 on a multi-annual guidance programme for the fishing fleet of the United Kingdom for the period 1993 to 1996 pursuant to Council regulation (EEC) No. 4028/86 sets out the reductions required in the United Kingdom's fleet capacity. A copy is available in the House Library.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what action has already been taken to ensure that the United Kingdom meets catching capacity targets for 1996 set under the multi-annual guidance plan;

(2) what measures the Government intend imposing on the fishing industry for 1995 to ensure that the United Kingdom meets catching capacity targets for 1996 set under the multi-annual guidance plan.

Mr. Jack: The 1993 and 1994 decommissioning schemes should reduce fleet capacity by about 4.8 per cent. at a cost of £16.7 million. My right hon. Friend the Minister announced on 18 January that a further £28

million will be made available for decommissioning increasing the amount for 1995–96 to £12 million and continuing the scheme at this rate for a further two years.

Capacity penalties on licence transfers and aggregations also contribute to the achievement of the MAGP target by requiring a reduction in aggregate capacity on each occasion.

We shall be monitoring the progress of the reduction in our fleet but I do not expect that it will be necessary to impose further measures in 1995 unless it becomes evident that fishing effort of the remaining fleet is rising.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action the Commission has taken to condemn the landing of undersize fish in Spanish waters.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* It has not been the procedure of the Commission to publish details of reports made by the inspectors of member states enforcement of, and adherence to, the rules of the common fisheries policy. The United Kingdom was however, successful at the December Fisheries Council in securing a commitment from the Commission that it would report annually on inspections it carried out in member states, together with an assessment of the results of those inspections and details of any improvements in national enforcement arrangements which it had recommended.

Water Pollution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department is taking to minimise agricultural pollution of rivers and seas in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: My Department provides free advice to farmers on pollution prevention, has widely distributed free codes of good agricultural practice and has in place a significant research and development programme examining how to minimise pollution from farm wastes, nutrients and pesticides. In addition, 32 nitrate-sensitive areas have been designated, and consultation is currently taking place over designating 72 vulnerable zones under the EC nitrate directive with a view to reducing nitrate leaching. Furthermore, all pesticides are subject to strict approval arrangements which take into account their potential to pollute water. Regular reviews of older pesticides ensure that they continue to meet our strict safety standards. My Department also carries out research into the fate of various contaminants in coastal waters and makes a significant contribution to monitoring those waters through a national monitoring programme.

Set-aside Land

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the latest developments in discussions with the EC regarding enabling set-aside land to be used for tree-growing; and if he will specify the types of trees included in such arrangements.

Mr. Jack: I am pleased to say that the European Commission has now accepted in principle the United Kingdom's view that land taken out of arable production under the forestry and agri-environmental schemes or "structural" set-aside should, under certain conditions, be allowed to count against a farmer's set-aside obligation under the arable area payments scheme or "market" set-aside. We now need a rapid decision in Council to amend the relevant legislation. Once the proposal has been adopted, we anticipate that the new approach will give a welcome boost to our environmental and farm woodland schemes.

Subject to the detailed rules to be agreed, land planted to woodland under the farm woodland premium scheme and the woodland grant scheme will be eligible to count towards set-aside. Most broadleaved and coniferous species may be planted, but planting under the FWPS for the purposes of agro-forestry or for producing coppice, Christmas trees or cricket bat willow is not permitted.

Short rotation coppice may already be grown on set-aside land under the non-food use rules. We have announced our intention to offer grants under the woodland grant scheme to support this activity and I hope that the Council decision referred to above will provide the legal basis for this, too.

Irish Box

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial aid has been offered to the Government of the Republic of Ireland in connection with the revised access arrangements for the Irish box; and for what purpose it is designed.

Mr. Jack: The agreement reached at the December Fisheries Council provides for additional financial aid to be provided for Ireland in order to improve controls, including operating expenditure, allowable under Community practice and within the framework of the financial guidelines.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of resources for the management supervision of fishing in the Irish box; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Detailed plans for the implementation of the control measures for the Irish box from 1 January 1996 have still to be developed. In developing such measures, we shall be making a very careful assessment of the resources necessary to ensure effective enforcement of the new rules.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the United Kingdom will retain responsibility for the management of fishing in the Irish box; when the details for the management plans will be considered by the Council of Ministers; and what application has been made to the EC for the costs involved.

Mr. Jack: There is no change in the areas for which coastal member states have responsibility. The United Kingdom retains responsibility for enforcement of the common fisheries policy in those parts of the Irish box which fall within UK fishery limits. The rest of the Irish box remains, as now, the responsibility of the Irish Republic's enforcement authorities. The United Kingdom will be co-operating with the Republic of Ireland to ensure the effective operation of those provisions in the agreement which are relevant to the Irish box. The necessary measures will be put in hand in the forthcoming months. No application has been made to the EC for the costs involved, but some enforcement expenditure in the UK may be eligible for aid.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Gambia

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what considerations underlay the timing, in relation to the abortive coup in The Gambia, of the issuing of his Department's advice to United Kingdom citizens not to travel to that country.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the letter I sent him on 9 January. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the implications for United Kingdom policy towards The Gambia of the restoration of diplomatic relations between that country and Libya.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has a long-standing friendship with the Gambian people. It is for the Gambian Government to decide whom they have relations with.

Diplomatic Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the total diplomatic expenditures for each year from 1979 to 1994 in 1993 prices.

Mr. Goodlad: The information expressed in 1993–94 prices, using figures for the overseas representation and other external relations votes, is contained in the table.

All figures shown gross in £ million at 1993–94 prices

Years	*Diplomatic expenditure*	*Of which peacekeeping*
1978–79	778	34
1979–80	782	24
1980–81	728	22
1981–82	773	52
1982–83	844	53
1983–84	904	57
1984–85	899	51
1985–86	762	48
1986–87	809	47
1987–88	819	41
1988–89	736	46
1989–90	857	64
1990–91	882	40
1991–92	980	64
1992–93	1,187	191
1993–94	1,226	235

Expenditure

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the actual Foreign Office expenditures, not including overseas development expenditures, for each year from 1979 to 1994 expressed in 1993 prices.

Mr. Goodlad: The information, expressed in 1993–94 prices, is contained in the table.

All figures shown gross in £ million at 1993–94 prices

Years	*Foreign Office Expenditure*
1978–79	960
1979–80	958
1980–81	907
1981–82	956
1982–83	1,038
1983–84	1,106
1984–85	1,106
1985–86	976
1986–87	1,038
1987–88	1,042
1988–89	1,025
1989–90	1,090
1990–91	1,140
1991–92	1,245
1992–93	1,453
1993–94	1,500

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was *(a)* actual and *(b)* budgeted expenditure on Foreign Office overseas representation for each year from 1979 to 1994 expressed in 1993 prices.

Mr. Goodlad: The information, using figures for the overseas representation vote—votes 1, 2, 8 and part of 5 before 1985–86—expressed in 1993–94 prices, is contained in the table.

All figures shown gross in £ million at 1993–94 prices

Years	*Overseas Representation*	
	Actual	*Budgeted*
1978–79	640	653
1979–80	604	628
1980–81	610	655
1981–82	623	662
1982–83	643	660
1983–84	741	756
1984–85	771	778
1985–86	630	661
1986–87	623	652
1987–88	636	665
1988–89	615	632
1989–90	641	660
1990–91	653	665
1991–92	700	707
1992–93	764	781
1993–94	801	858

Atomic Energy Co-operation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each of the amendments made by date and command number since 1965 to the 1958 United States–United Kingdom mutual defence agreement on atomic energy co-operation, setting out the particular purpose of each amendment; and which amendments were ratified in accordance with the Ponsonby rule.

Mr. David Davis: The amendments which have been made to the 1958 United States–United Kingdom mutual defence agreement since 1965 entered into force on the following dates: 28 March 1969, Cmnd 4119; 8 April 1970, Cmnd 4383; 26 January 1975, Cmnd 6017; 25 March 1980, Cmnd 7976; 16 November 1984, Cmnd 9434; and 23 December 1994, Cmnd 2686. The prime purpose of each amendment was to extend the time-limited article III bis; occasionally new paragraphs

on nuclear materials accountancy procedures were inserted.

As for the last part of the hon. Member's question, that information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the reason for the time period that elapsed between the presenting to the US Congress by President Clinton of the proposed amendments to the 1958 United States–United Kingdom mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matters and the same amendments being laid before Parliament.

Mr. David Davis: The 1994 amendment to the 1958 United States–United Kingdom mutual defence agreement was laid before Parliament in good time in order to ensure its ratification before the end of 1994. As US procedures require such documents to be laid before Congress for 90 days, it was necessary for the amendment to be presented earlier in the United States.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), has yet replied to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) in respect of the working group dealing with co-operation on computer modelling referred to in the debate on the Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic energy, *Official Report*, 15 December, column *1238*.

Mr. David Davis: I wrote to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South on 9 January. I shall place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the technical annex to the 1958 United States—United Kingdom mutual defence agreement on atomic energy co-operation, as amended; and what information he has as to its publication status in the United States.

Mr. David Davis: The technical annex to the 1958 United Kingdom—United States mutual defence agreement is a classified document. I have no plans to place a copy in the Library or to arrange for its publication.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters in regard to regional non-proliferation arrangements and the prospects of Pakistan and India joining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty were discussed during his recent visit to Pakistan and India.

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs urged Pakistan and India to accede to the non-proliferation treaty. Both indicated that they were unable at this time to sign the treaty.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's proposals put to the final preparatory committee for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty preview and extension conference in New York in January.

Mr. David Davis: Our aim at the fourth preparatory committee for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty conference will be to settle a number of unresolved issues left over from the third preparatory committee. These include the allocation of posts, the provision of background papers, the agenda, and questions related to financing and rules of procedure for the conference, which opens on 17 April 1995.

Uranium Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the next EU Foreign Affairs Council the allegations made by the South African Government on 9 January in respect of the sale by France of enriched uranium to South Africa in the 1980s; and if he will press the presidency of the Council of Ministers to investigate the allegation.

Mr. David Davis: I have no plans to raise this matter at the next EU Foreign Affairs Council.

Croatia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the President of Croatia had made about the removal of UNPROFOR troops; and what was Her Majesty's Government's response.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: President Tudjman of Croatia wrote to the United Nations Secretary-General on 13 January to inform him that the Croatian Government did not wish UNPROFOR's mandate to be renewed in the UN protected areas beyond 31 March 1995. The Croatian deputy Foreign Minister had forewarned us of this decision on 11 January.

In our response, we have made clear our disappointment with this development and our concern that it puts at risk the search for a peace settlement in the region. UNPROFOR has a vital role in this process. Although we recognise the domestic pressures on the Croatian Government to find a solution to the situation on the Krajina, we have urged them, both nationally and through our support for the Security Council statement on 17 January, to reconsider their decision.

Hong Kong

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by the European Union to establish a human rights centre in Hong Kong; and what has been the response of the Chinese Government.

Mr. Goodlad: The European Union has no plans to set up a human rights centre in Hong Kong. The European Parliament added a new "remark" to the 1995 budget line B7-5240 to the effect that the budget line could be used to "promote the protection of human rights in countries where there is soon to be a change of sovereignty."

Such remarks represent the views of the European Parliament alone, and have no binding force on the other European Union institutions.

We are not aware of any response from the Chinese Government.

BBC World Service

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the BBC World Service with particular reference to funding the balance of broadcasts in different languages

and the relationship between his Department and the service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: As stated in the White Paper on "The Future of the BBC" Cm 2621 of July 1994, the World Service will in future operate to targets and performance indicators agreed with FCO, instead of a detailed prescription of languages and hours of broadcasts. Priorities for the allocation of resources are discussed regularly between the World Service and the FCO.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) on 9 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *425–26*, which gave details of some of the targets agreed for the current triennium.

East Timor

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what ways British policy on the annexation of East Timor by Indonesia has changed since the mid-1970s; and what evidence he has of the effect of these changes.

Mr Goodlad: Our policy has been consistent throughout this period. We do not recognise Indonesia's annexation of East Timor and continue to encourage Indonesia and Portugal to work together, under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, to find a lasting and acceptable solution to the problem. We welcome the outcome of the latest round of talks on 9 January.

Rwanda

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has recently been taken by UNAMIR forces in Rwanda to disarm and control former soldiers in the Rwandan army.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UNAMIR's mandate does not cover disarming former soldiers of the Rwandan army and we have no reports that such action has taken place.

French Foreign Policy

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has expressed concern to the French Government about the adverse consequences of their foreign policy initiatives with Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have raised the recent French decision to open an interests section in Baghdad both bilaterally and in discussion with European Union partners. We expressed our concern at the move, and underlined that we had no plans to follow suit, given Iraq's continuing failure to implement outstanding Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has expressed concern to the French Government about the adverse consequences of their foreign policy initiatives with Algeria.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The French were party to the EU statement in September 1994 calling on all sides to cease all acts of violence and to allow peaceful dialogue.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has expressed concern to the French Government about the adverse consequences of their foreign policy initiatives with Sudan.

Mr. Hogg: EU concerns about such issues as the human rights situation and civil war in Sudan are supported by all partners. Recent EU joint action has included a statement on 31 October which condemned the use of violence by the Sudanese authorities to evict residents from a Khartoum squatter camp.

Bermuda

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the criteria for selection for the position of commissioner of police and deputy commissioner of police in the overseas dependent territory of Bermuda.

Mr. Baldry: It is that the officers should be qualified and experienced with the ability to introduce the most modern administration, management and policing techniques to see that the Bermuda police service provides efficient and effective policing, responsive to the needs of the community.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures are being used to select the successful candidates for the positions of commissioner and deputy commissioner of police in Bermuda; and which individuals will be involved in their selection.

Mr. Baldry: In accordance with section 87 of the Bermuda constitution, the appointments are made by the Governor in consultation with the Public Service Commission.

A shortlist of eight Association of Chief Police Officers candidates was prepared by the ODA senior police adviser in consultation with Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary and the deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan police. Preliminary interviews of these candidates were conducted by the deputy Governor, the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs and the ODA senior police adviser. Three of the eight were selected to travel to Bermuda for a final interview.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the present salaries of the commissioner of police and the assistant commissioner of police in Bermuda; and what are the proposed salaries for both posts for their replacements.

Mr. Baldry: The present salaries are $110,465 and $88,644 respectively. The proposed salaries are the same.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if native Bermudians may apply for all vacant posts in the administration of Bermuda.

Mr. Baldry: Yes. Bermudians are the first source for candidates for all vacant posts in the public service in Bermuda.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of state for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the current vacancies in Bermuda for the posts of commissioner and deputy commissioner are open to *(a)* suitably qualified Bermudans, *(b)* suitably qualified candidates from other dependent territories, *(c)* suitably qualified candidates from the Caribbean and other areas in the region and *(d)* suitably qualified candidates from Africa.

Mr. Baldry: Yes. All vacancies are open to suitably qualified candidates. Priority is given to Bermudians where possible. In this particular instance, in the absence of any suitably qualified Bermudian candidates, the

Governor and Government decided to recruit from the UK.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the country policy plan for the overseas dependent territory of Bermuda.

Mr. Baldry: There is no country policy plan for Bermuda. Country policy plans are draw up for those Caribbean dependent territories which are recipients of aid from Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will place in the Library the report produced by Lionel Grundy on the Bermudan police force in 1994; what assessment he has made of the effect of the report on morale of the Bermudan police force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The report was compiled by HM inspector-general of the dependent territories constabulary, following a request from the Governor of Bermuda. The report is confidential to the Governor and Government of Bermuda and will not, therefore, be placed in the Library.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's position regarding the recruitment of non-Bermudian policemen at all ranks to the Bermuda police force.

Mr. Baldry: No. That is a matter for the Governor and the Government of Bermuda.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where the advertisements for the posts of commissioner and deputy commissioner of police in the overseas dependent territory of Bermuda have been placed.

Mr. Baldry: The posts were not advertised in this instance and, because of the need to fill the posts with reasonable expedition, the Governor and Government decided to recruit from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which posts in the overseas dependent territory of Bermuda have been reserved specifically for expatriate white Britons;

(2) what representations he or the Governor of Bermuda have received from opposition parties in Bermuda regarding the replacements for the commissioner and deputy commissioner of police; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: None.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 12 December, *Official Report*, columns *463–66*, concerning overseas travel at public expense by spouses of Ministers, what proportion of the spouses' visit was dedicated to official visits and business.

Mr. Baldry: When a spouse accompanies a Minister on an overseas visit, her time is dedicated to accompanying the Minister on his official programme or following a parallel programme.

Pakistan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made since his return from Pakistan to the Pakistan Government regarding legislation they have proposed providing for the death penalty for certain categories of drug traffickers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have made no such representations.

More than 80 per cent. of the heroin seized in this country originates from south-west Asia. Much of this passes through Pakistan.

We have for some time been pressing the Government of Pakistan to introduce comprehensive anti-narcotics legislation. The ordinance signed by the President on 5 January has the force of law. Many of the provisions of the new ordinance are welcome and should enhance Pakistan's ability to combat drug trafficking.

I welcome provision in the new legislation for the seizure and forfeiture of the proceeds of drug trafficking. I hope that, before long, Britain and Pakistan will negotiate a bilateral asset confiscation agreement which would allow us to trace, freeze and confiscate the assets derived by drug traffickers from their crime. No one should profit from this evil trade.

The inclusion of provision for the death penalty as the maximum sentence for the possession, import, export or transhipment of more than 100gm of heroin—or equivalent—is a matter for the Government of Pakistan, provided that respect is shown for the provisions on the death penalty in international human rights law.

Overseas Diplomatic Residences

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *168* and the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) 16 January, *Official Report*, column *286*, what information is collected about the cost of upkeep of overseas diplomatic residences owned by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Goodlad: Information on all expenditure associated with diplomatic properties is accounted for in accordance with Government accounting rules. The expenditure on upkeep of property at posts is recorded by functional subhead—maintenance, furnishing, utilities etcetera—and not by individual property. To identify the upkeep, therefore, of owned residences of heads of post, for example, it would be necessary to extract specific information from a range of subhead records held at posts. This is not readily done. With the advent of a new financial management accounting system in April 1996, it is the FCO's intention to make aggregation of the relevant figures more easily attainable.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what factors made it *(a)* possible to provide information in respect of the cost of upkeep of diplomatic residences in response to the question of the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *286* and *(b)* impossible to provide such information in response to the question of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley of 6 December, *Official Report*, column *168*.

Mr. Goodlad: The question from the hon. Member of Wallsend of 16 January asked for details of total running

costs for certain posts and total entertainment costs for those posts. This information is held centrally and is therefore relatively easy to identify.

The question from the hon. Member for Cynon Valley of 6 December asked for details of the cost of the upkeep of owned residences of heads of post. Such expenditure is included in a range of overseas subheads which combine the total cost of maintenance, furnishings, utilities and other upkeep costs for overseas offices, heads of mission residences and staff residential accommodation. Since the responsibility for such maintenance is partially delegated to posts and partially exercised in London, each post would be required to prepare and submit separate analyses; this could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy in respect of UN Security Council resolutions regarding the retention of full-scale sanctions against Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UN sanctions against Iraq should remain in place until the Iraqi Government comply fully with their obligations under all relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

DEFENCE

Pitreavie

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the final destination for the Comcen equipment currently at Pitreavie.

Mr. Soames: On current plans, the principal items of Comcen equipment at Pitreavie would be relocated as follows:

a. Tandem CLX computers to the new Portsmouth dockyard Comcen.

b. Ten channel RATT ship shore equipment to Faslane.

c. Two core network packet switches to other nodes in the naval shore telecommunications network. The precise destination remains subject to detailed planning for reconfiguration of the NSTN.

d. NATO submarine broadcast control equipment to either Comcen Whitehall or RAF High Wycombe.

A number of small obsolescent equipments and system components at Pitreavie would be disposed of. Those with remaining useful life would be retained in store to support other Comcens.

As stated in the consultation document on Pitreavie, where final destinations for relocating equipment are unclear the most expensive option has formed the basis of the estimated costs involved.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations underlay the decision to include in the average costs quoted in C31 consultation document of the defence costs study on Pitreavie of both general running costs and one-off costs.

Mr. Soames: Both general running costs and one-off costs need to be taken into account to gain a complete understanding of the overall costs and relative savings associated with particular options. This was the basis of the approach used in the consultation document on Pitreavie. In the case of future unprogrammed one-off costs, provision was made, where appropriate, on the basis of figures derived from historical expenditure patterns.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the conduct of the consultation process over the future of Pitreavie.

Mr. Soames: Proposals on the future location of FOSNNI's operational headquarters were promulgated in a consultation document dated 21 October 1994. Amended financial information relating to these proposals was issued subsequently on 16 December. The period allowed for consultation was extended slightly to allow for this additional information to be studied and consultation formally completed on 6 January 1995. Responses to our proposals are currently being given careful consideration and I hope to announce a decision shortly.

Service Accommodation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to maximise proceeds on the sale of Ministry of Defence houses.

Mr. Soames: Married quarters which are suitable for individual sale are normally offered for sale to service personnel through the services discount scheme. Any properties not suitable for this scheme are currently being offered for sale in bulk to housing associations at a discount in return for nomination rights on some of the properties for personnel leaving the services. Any properties not taken up through schemes are offered for sale on the open market at full market price.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the breakdown by company and country of origin of purchases of motor vehicles under his Department's enabling contract arrangements in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Military Equipment

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he gave to the leasing of tracked tractors before inviting Caterpillar Overseas SA of Switzerland to tender for the reconditioning of 82 tracked tractors under tender No. ABRO1A2/1695; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Staff Cars

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he gave to the leasing or contract hiring of staff cars before inviting tenders for replacement of part of the staff car fleet under tender No. LV2a/255; whether the successful contractor will be required to provide maintenance of the vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Naval Equipment Procurement

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about naval equipment procurement plans.

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased to confirm that an order valued in the region of £40 million has been placed with BAeSEMA to build an ocean survey vessel for the Royal Navy's hydrographic service. The new ship will be built by Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd. in Devon under sub-contract to BAeSEMA and will carry out systematic hydrographic surveys in the world's oceans, replacing the existing specialised vessel HMS Hecla. This order recognises the importance to the Royal Navy of a continuing specialist hydrographic capability and is part of the Government's plans to replace current hydrographic vessels and equipment as it becomes necessary, which were announced by the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement in the House on 8 March 1994.

Bosnia

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the United Kingdom intends to respond to the recent United Nations request for additional troops and equipment to enable UNPROFOR to implement the cessation of hostilities agreement in Bosnia.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government made a formal offer to the UN yesterday of an additional United Kingdom contribution to UNPROFOR. This consists of three Royal Air Force Chinook helicopters for military resupply and movement of UNPROFOR, and a further 12 British Army helicopters, comprising six Lynx and six Gazelles for air reconnaissance and transport. A further three Chinooks will be available on standby in the UK. We are also offering to provide up to 19 additional UN military observers to augment the 18 UK UNMOs already in theatre.

In reaching this decision, the Government judged it essential to respond positively to the UN request in order to support the recent cessation of hostilities agreement, which offers an opportunity for concluding a durable, negotiated peace settlement to which all the parties can agree and by which they will abide. As a member of the five-nation contact group leading the peace negotiations, and as a nation with one of the largest military contingents in Bosnia, this positive response demonstrates the Government's firm and continuing commitment to a lasting peaceful solution to the conflict.

Directorate of Marine Services (Naval)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to contractorise or privatise those depots and vessels that are administered by the Directorate of Marine Services (Naval).

Mr. Soames: We have at present no plans to contractorise or privatise any of the depots or vessels administered by the Director of Marine Services (Naval). Invitations to tender will shortly be issued to a number of companies and to an in-house team, however, inviting bids for the provision of services undertaken at present by the directorate.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed at Her Majesty's mooring and salvage depots throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: A total of 137 staff are employed in the depots at Pembroke dock and Fairlie.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed by his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval).

Mr. Soames: The service employs some 1,770 staff.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed aboard vessels that are the responsibility of his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval).

Mr. Soames: Some 1,200 of the directorate's staff are employed afloat.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those contractors who are carrying out marine service operations for his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval); when they began their contract; how long the contracts were for; and which operations they cover.

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

Contractor	Period of contract	Operation
James Fisher and Son plc	3 June 1991 to 2 June 1995	Range safety
AV Seawork	1 May 1993 to 30 April 1998	Support to training exercises, including sea survival.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when was the last review carried out into the operation of his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval); and what were the recommendations of that review.

Mr. Soames: A study into the feasibility of market testing the Directorate of Marine Services was completed in February 1994; this concluded that the marine services organisation should be market tested. The future of the organisation was also considered during "Front Line First", in common with all naval support services; this endorsed the findings of the market testing feasibility study.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many reviews have been carried out into the operation of his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval) in the last 10 years; and what were the recommendations of those reviews.

Mr. Soames: In addition to the market testing feasibility study and "Front Line First", which were both completed during 1994, there have been two separate reviews of the totality of operations carried out by the Directorate of Marine Services (Naval). The first of these was undertaken during 1989–90 and resulted in a division of the directorate's responsibilities between the Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command and the Chief of Fleet Support. As a result of difficulties subsequently experienced with this approach, a second review was undertaken in 1991–92, resulting in re-unification of the directorate.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those depots that are the responsibility of his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval).

Mr. Soames: The Director of Marine Services (Naval), whose headquarters are in Bath, is responsible for:

Her Majesty's mooring and marine salvage depot, Pembroke Dock, Dyfed;

The NATO mooring and support depot, Fairlie, Strathclyde;

Marine services bases within HM naval bases at Devonport, Portsmouth, Portland, Faslane and Rosyth;

Marine services bases at Greenock and Kyle of Lochalsh.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what operations which are the responsibility of his Department's Directorate of Marine Services (Naval) have been privatised or contractorised in the past 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The following operations, previously the responsibility of the Directorate of Marine Services (Naval), have been privatised or contractorised during the past 10 years:

Range safety at coastal ranges around the United Kingdom (contractorised);

Support to sea survival and other training exercises (contractorised);

The Gourock to Kilgreggan ferry service (privatised).

Army Base Repair Organisation Bovington

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have started employment at ABRO Bovington since that establishment became an agency; how many were, on recruitment, *(a)* established civil servants with more than 10 years service, *(b)* established civil servants with less than 10 years service, *(c)* currently unemployed, *(d)* ex–casual or period contract MOD or civil service staff and *(e)* currently employed outside of the MOD and Civil Service.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from J R Drew to Mr. Ian Bruce, dated 20 January 1995:

I am responding, as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation, to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people who have joined the staff of ABRO Bovington since the launch of the Agency on 1 April 1993.

The total number is 48, which breaks down as follows:

	Industrial Staff	*Non-Industrial Staff*	*Total*
a. established civil servants with more than 10 years service:	1	1	2
b. established civil servants with less than 10 years service:	2	3	5
c. currently unemployed:	3	3	6
d. ex-casual or period contract MOD or Civil Service staff:	25	2	27
e. currently employed outside of the MOD and Civil Service:	7	1	8

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the plans for the future of the Atomic Weapons Establishment.

Mr. Freeman: Hunting-BRAE Ltd., which manages and operates the Atomic Weapons Establishment on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, is today announcing a rationalisation of the sites of the establishment. This will involve some transfers of work to Aldermaston, and also the closure of the Cardiff site, the partial closure of the Burghfield site, and the transfer of the responsibility for some of the work carried out at Foulness site to the single defence science and technology agency proposed by the defence costs study. In all there will be about 850 job losses.

These proposals will be made possible by the completion of work on Trident warheads. They will allow sensible economies to be made without in any way affecting our ability to meet our present and future needs, and they have our full support. Our nuclear policy is unchanged. The Atomic Weapons Establishment will continue to underwrite the safety and reliability of warheads now in service and will retain the capability to design and produce warheads in future as circumstances make necessary.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the proportion of pensioners receiving income from savings identified as *(a)* all pensioners, *(b)* single male pensioners aged under 75 years, *(c)* single female pensioners aged under 75 years, *(d)* single pensioners aged under 75 years, *(e)* pensioner couples aged under 75 years, *(f)* single male pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(g)* single female pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(h)* single pensioners aged 75 years and over and *(i)* pensioner couples where at least one partner is aged 75 years and over; and if he will provide figures for the mean and median amount received for the latest year in which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

The proportion of Pensioners with Investment Income with the Mean and Median Amounts for those in Receipt

	Proportion with Investment Income (per cent.)	*Mean Amount (£ per week)*	*Median Amount (£ per week)*
All Pensioner Units	76	43.30	10.10
Single male pensioners under 75	70	66.60	23.30

The proportion of Pensioners with Investment Income with the Mean and Median Amounts for those in Receipt

	Proportion with Investment Income (per cent.)	*Mean Amount (£ per week)*	*Median Amount (£ per week)*
Single female pensioners under 75	72	34.40	7.30
Single pensioners under 75	71	41.00	9.10
Pensioner couples under 75	83	53.60	20.60
Single male pensioners 75 and over	68	51.10	8.60
Single female pensioners 75 and over	71	25.10	3.50
Single pensioners 75 and over	70	30.20	4.10
Pensioner couples with one partner 75 and over	83	55.60	13.40

Notes:
1. Percentages are rounded to the nearest one per cent. amounts rounded to the nearest 10p.
2. Estimates are drawn from the 1992 family expenditure survey at July 1992 prices.
3. Single pensioners are defined as those over state pension age, couples are those where the husband is over state pension age.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was *(a)* the mean and *(b)* the median income of (i) single pensioners and (ii) pensioner couples before and after housing costs in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

Mean and median income for single pensioners and pensioner couples 1992 (£ per week)

	Single pensioners	*Pensioner couples*
Mean net BHC	109.40	206.20
Mean net AHC	93.00	190.70
Median net BHC	86.30	162.90
Median net AHC	62.80	145.80

Notes:
1 Figures are rounded to the nearest 10p.
2 Estimates derived from the 1992 family expenditure survey.
3 "Single pensioners" are defined as single people aged over state pension age, "Pensioner couples" are married couples where the husband is over state pension age.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of pensioner households with total weekly incomes below income support level.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Estimates of the number of pensioner units who would be eligible for income support and with incomes below their income support level are contained in the DSS publication "Income-related Benefits: estimates of take-up in 1992" which was published today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

National Insurance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the annual revenue which would be raised by the Exchequer if employer national insurance contributions were extended to cover all benefits in kind.

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is estimated that the extension of employers' contributions to all taxable benefits in kind would raise approximately £250 million in a full year. This is based on an estimate of taxable benefits in kind reportable to the Inland Revenue in 1994–95. It assumes the rate of national insurance contributions payable as currently chargeable under class 1A.

Take-up Rates

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the benefit take-up figures for 1992 will become available.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of pensioner households which do not claim *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* income support to which they would be entitled; and what is this figure as a proportion of the total non-take-up of these benefits.

Mr. Roger Evans: Estimates of the income-related benefit take-up for 1992 have today been published by the Government Statistical Service. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Disability Legislation

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to produce a copy of the Disability Discrimination Bill using pictures and simple text to make it accessible to people with learning difficulties.

Mr. Hague: The White Paper, which explains in detail the Bill's provisions, is available in a full and simplified summary version on audio cassette. A shortened, simplified written version is also available. We have no plans to produce copies of the Bill in pictorial formats.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to produce a copy of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill using pictures and simple text to make it accessible to people with learning difficulties.

Mr. Hague: Publication of private Members' Bills is arranged by the Member concerned. There are no plans for this Department to become involved in the publication of this Bill in alternative formats.

Child Support

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care on income support prior to April 1993 *(a)* have had their cases taken on by the Child Support Agency and *(b)* will have the take-on of their cases delayed;

(2) how many parents with care, who have not returned their maintenance application form for over six months, will not have their cases pursued;

(3) how many parents with care in receipt of family credit prior to April 1993 have *(a)* had their cases taken on by the Child Support Agency and *(b)* have still to have their cases taken on;

(4) how many parents with care, who have returned their maintenance applications forms with insufficient information to progress the case, will not have their case pursued; and, in this category, what is the Child Support Agency's definition of insufficient information;

(5) if parents with care who do not return their maintenance application forms for six months or more will have their cases delayed or if this provision will apply only to those outstanding for more than six months at 20 December 1994.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 20 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security on the operations of the Child Support Agency.

Between April 1993 and the end of October 1994, the Agency recorded the issue of 1,111,700 maintenance application forms to parents with care. Of these, 291,000 went to parents who were in receipt of income support before the implementation of the Child Support Act 1991, and 296,000 to parents receiving Family Credit (FC) or Disability Working Allowance (DWA). Cases where FC or DWA was in payment prior to April 1993 cannot be identified separately within this latter figure, but there should be no remaining cases in this category where an application form has not been issued to the parent with care.

The measures announced on 20 December will enable the Agency to give priority to improving its performance in achieving accurate and regular payments of maintenance in the applications already received, and in the new cases which it will continue to take on.

The measures allow the Agency to defer the take on of the remaining pre–April 1993 income support cases, with an estimated 340,000 cases being deferred.

In addition, some several thousand cases are expected to be deferred where an application form was issued more than six months ago but either has not been returned at all, or is lacking information necessary to progress the case. Such information includes, for example, details of the absent parent and/or the qualifying child. Parents who have returned their incomplete form will be asked whether they wish the Agency to continue to process their application at the present time. This will be a one off exercise relating only to maintenance application forms issued before 1 July 1994.

A precise figure will be available for the cases which can be deferred where the application form was issued before 1 July once an exercise has been completed to identify those which fulfil the criteria. This should be about the middle of March.

The Agency will continue to deal with all applications arising from new and repeat claims to benefit, and from parents not in receipt of benefit without existing maintenance agreements. It will also still be able to take on cases where parents in receipt of income support wish to make an early application for a maintenance assessment. There is absolutely no question of deferring a case because the Absent Parent has refused to cooperate with the Agency.

The Agency will recommence the take–on of the deferred cases where the Parent With Care is currently in receipt of a prescribed benefit just as soon as it is in a position to deal with them promptly and effectively.

I hope that this is of help.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care since implementation of the Child Support Act 1991 have *(a)* not returned the maintenance application form, *(b)* had good cause accepted and *(c)* been subject to the benefit penalty.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Frank Field, dated 20 January 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the total number of maintenance assessment forms not returned to the Child Support Agency and the number of claims by Parents With Care (PWC) of good cause not to cooperate with the Agency in arranging maintenance.

According to the Agency's records, 1,111,733 maintenance application forms have been issued and 802,561 returned. However, not all of the remainder still have action outstanding since good cause activity will either have been completed or still be ongoing in many. In others, the parent with care will no longer be in receipt of a prescribed benefit.

The Agency accepted that in 57,000 cases the PWC had good cause not to cooperate with the Agency. Of the 39,000 cases where good cause was not accepted, a total of 11,500 reduced benefit directions were issued to the Benefits Agency for imposition.

Details of the number of cases in which benefit was actually reduced is not currently available, except at disproportionate cost. The Agency is, however, taking steps which will make this information available in the future.

I hope that this is of help.

Automated Credit Transfers

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners opted to receive their state pension by bank automated credit transfer in 1994.

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Sir Andrew Bowden, dated 19 January 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the proportion of pensioners receiving payment of Retirement Pension (RP) by bank automated credit transfer (ACT).

Information is not available in the exact form requested. This is because information is not collated to define whether ACT payments are made to either a bank or building society account. To provide information specifically relating to ACT payments made to banks would incur a disproportionate cost.

As of 20 November 1994, the latest date for which figures are available, a total of 2,844,721 pensioners were having their RP paid by ACT. This represented 28.63 per cent. of the total caseload.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many parliamentary questions she has referred to chief executives of next steps agencies in each year since 1992.

Mr. Heseltine: The information is as follows:

Parliamentary session	*Questions answered by chief executives*[1]
1992–93	25
1993–94	11
1994–95[2]	5

Notes:
[1] A number of questions have required answers from some, or all of the Department's 10 agencies.
[2] Figures shown are as at 18 January 1995.

South Africa (Visits)

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how often he has visited South Africa since the beginning of 1993; what were the dates of these visits; and if he was accompanied by British businessmen on any of these visits.

Mr. Heseltine: I have visited South Africa once since the beginning of 1993. My visit took place over the period 9 to 15 July 1994 and I was accompanied by 57 British business men.

Directors (Disqualification)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he intends to take to ensure that directors are disqualified when they have committed a misconduct in relation to the insolvency of a company.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: During 1994, proceedings were issued against 747 unfit directors of insolvent companies representing a 77 per cent. increase over 1993—422 directors. During 1995, it is proposed to make further additional resources available to the Insolvency Service's disqualification unit, which combined with the benefits accruing from implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Public Accounts Committee on disqualification, will enable the increased effectiveness achieved in 1994 to be further improved.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Fraser: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the cost or savings to his Department of contracting out of the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The consultants, Stoy Hayward Consulting, concluded that value for money and other potential benefits needed to be definitively tested; and that the bidding process would provide such a test of value for money.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the applicability of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Order 1981 to the contracting out by his Department of the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No decision to contract out work of official receivers has been taken; any decision would be subject to the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 and the procedures applicable to contracting out which are set out in it.

In the circumstances it is too early to consider the issue of Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, the implications of which may not become clear until the nature of proposals in any bidding process could be assessed.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the Lois computer system; for what purpose it was designed; and what estimate he has made as to whether his Department will recover the cost of investment in the Lois computer system following the contracting out of the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The estimated cost of the Lois computer system, which is designed to assist official receivers in the administration of cases and in particular with the production of the many documents that have to be prepared, is £8,490,150.

As no decision to contract out the work of official receivers has been taken, the question of whether the costs of Lois would be recovered in the event of such a decision has not yet been considered.

Advisory Bodies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the policies and legislation initiated over the past three years that were based on proposals from *(a)* the Overseas Projects Board, *(b)* the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, *(c)* the Energy Advisory Panel and *(d)* the Advisory Committee on Coal Research.

Mr. Heseltine: The information requested is as follows:

a) Overseas Projects Board

No legislation has resulted from the work of the Overseas Project Board over the past three years. However it has acted as a valuable source of advice to Ministers on how Government resources including aid and trade provision, overseas projects fund and ECGD cover should best be directed. It has also set up sector working groups, co–opting wider industry representation with appropriate experience, to identify project opportunities overseas and develop tactics, jointly with government, to maximise the United Kingdom's chances of winning contracts. So far, seven groups have been set up covering airports; railways and mass transit; power; water industries; telecommunications; healthcare; education and training.

b) Offshore Industry Liaison Committee

OILCO does not initiate policies or legislation. It has advised Ministers on issues arising from activity on the United Kingdom Continental Shelf and has facilitated a dialogue on matters such as construction demand, forecast of activity and training. A working group set up under OILCO's auspices reported to UKCS competitiveness in February and November 1993.

c) Energy Advisory Panel

There have been no proposals from the energy advisory panel for policies and legislation as its principal role is to assist in the preparation of the Government's annual energy report.

d) Advisory Committee on Coal Research

No legislative proposals have been initiated by the advisory committee on coal research in the last three years. Policy was initiated by the Government under the advice of the coal task force, who were the predecessor to the ACCR. A summary of the policy is published in Energy Paper 63, which is held in the Library of the House of Commons.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the programme of work for *(a)* the Overseas Projects Board, *(b)* the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee, *(c)* the Energy Advisory Panel and *(d)* the Advisory Committee on Coal Research.

Mr. Heseltine: The information requested is as follows:

a) Overseas Projects Board

The Overseas Projects Board will continue to provide expert advice to Ministers and their officials on issues affecting UK industry's ability to compete effectively for major project

business overseas. The seven sector groups of the Board have produced action plans and have identified a number of opportunities. These are being pursued.

b) Offshore Industry Liaison Committee

OILCO does not have a programme of work. The committee is free to consider and give advice on all issues which fall within its terms of reference.

c) Energy Advisory Panel

The principal role of the energy advisory panel lies in assisting in the preparation of the Government's annual energy report. This involves regular meetings with officials to discuss the structure and content of the energy report.

d) Advisory Committee on Coal Research (ACCR)

The programme of work for the ACCR is as outlined in Energy Paper 63 (annex B) which is held in the Library of the House of Commons.

Correspondence

Mr. Heppell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a complaint from a member of the public would be treated unfavourably by his Department if the letter of complaint included grammatical errors.

Mr. Heseltine: It certainly should not be treated unfavourably.

Anglian TV Shares

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of the Board of Trade who was the independent QC called in to advise the Secretary of State on the DTI report on Lord Archer of Weston–super–Mare's share dealing in the Anglian TV shares; and what instructions he was given.

Mr. Heseltine: I was advised on this matter by Mr. Edmund Lawson QC. I am not prepared to disclose the instructions which he was given. These instructions and the advice which he gave were confidential, and to disclose them would involve disclosing the substance of the inspectors report, for which there is no provision in the Act.

Export Credits

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what months since 1980 the Export Credits Guarantee Department has declared Nigeria off–cover for medium–term export credit.

Mr. Needham: The ECGD, having paid substantial claims in respect of defaults on credits to Nigeria, suspended medium-term cover on 1 February 1984. However, already issued offers for medium–term cover were held valid until they expired. Such cover has not been available for new business since that date.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the definition of defence contracts as used by the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Needham: All sales involving overseas defence organisations such as ministries of defence or armed forces.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *76*, concerning overseas travel at public expense by spouses of Ministers, what proportion of the spouses' visit was dedicated to official visits and business.

Mr. Heseltine: Visits by Ministers overseas involve a full programme of official engagements. Many of these will not be appropriate for a spouse's participation. A spouse's visit will therefore include some of these engagements as well as separate engagements organised by the British embassy. This has been normal practice under successive Governments and applied in the case of all the visits by DTI Ministers referred to in my answer of 22 November.

Export Control (Costs)

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the total running costs of his Department's export control organisation for each of the last five financial years.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The total running costs for the Department's export control organisation for the financial years 1989–90, 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 were £2.6 million, £2.8 million, £3.3 million, £3.2 million, and £3.7 million respectively.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance was given by his Department to British companies visiting the Baghdad trade fair centre in November.

Mr. Needham: A number of British companies were given licences to communicate on the supply of humanitarian goods, currently permitted under UN sanctions, which enabled them to attend the Euromed and Watertech exhibitions held in Baghdad in November.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assistance is being given by his Department to the proposed trade mission to Iraq on 15 February;

(2) when he last met the Iraqi British interests group;

(3) which companies are involved in the proposed trade mission to Iraq on 15 February; what is its purpose; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what assistance is being given to *(a)* Thames Water International, *(b)* Amersham International, *(c)* Leyland Trucks, *(d)* RB International, *(e)* Angus Fires, *(f)* Quest International, *(g)* Metrito UK and *(h)* United Projects to visit Iraq in February.

Mr. Needham: I have heard of the proposed trade mission to Iraq by the Iraqi—British interests group and I have seen the reports of its activities in the press. I have not met the group. Neither it nor the companies reportedly involved are being provided with Government assistance to visit Iraq. Apart from those identified in the press, I am not aware of the companies involved.

Promotional Offers

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will consider introducing legislation that protects the consumer against the failure of promotional offers.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 19 January 1995]:* I consider existing controls in this area to be adequate.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lord Archer of Weston-super-Mare

Sir David Steel: To ask the Attorney-General what was the result of his action over the Lord Archer share dealing allegations with particular reference to possible grounds for prosecution; and what plans he has to take the matter further.

Mr. Heseltine: I have been asked to reply.

The Financial Services Act 1986 places responsibility for these matters on me. I appointed inspectors on 8 February 1994 to investigate allegations concerning share dealing by Lord Archer and they presented their report to me on 18 July 1994. As I announced on 28 July 1994, I concluded, on the basis of the inspectors' report and departmental and other, independent, legal advice, that the Department should take no further action against any of the individuals concerned in the investigation.

HEALTH

Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what places or areas in England or Wales responsibility for running the emergency ambulance service is that of an authority which includes directly elected members of the public, or persons other than those directly, or indirectly appointed as employed persons.

Mr. Sackville: All ambulances services in England are national health service trusts or parts of trusts, with the exception of the London ambulance service. All trusts have a chairman appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and up to five non-executive directors, two appointed by the relevant regional health authority and the remainder by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The London ambulance service is managed by South Thames regional health authority on behalf of the RHAs in London. Ambulance services in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made in respect of policy on mixed-sex wards in the national health service since 1965.

Mr. Sackville: None. National health service hospitals have always been expected, as a general principle, to provide accommodation in such a way as to preserve the dignity of the individual patient, prevent embarrassment, and at all times to ensure acceptable standards of privacy. This has not changed since 1965, but is now a national standard under the patients charter.

The patients charter in England has been strengthened to ensure that patients are better informed so as to enable them to make a more informed choice on whether to accept accommodation in a mixed-sex ward. Under new charter standards, patients should expect single-sex washing and toilet facilities.

General Practitioners, Sunderland

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what allocation of funds per patient is received *(a)* by general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* by non-general practitioner fundholders in Sunderland.

Mr. Malone: Information from Northern and Yorkshire region indicates that general practitioner fundholder budgets in Sunderland for 1994–95 average £140 per patient. District health authorities purchase all hospital and community health services for the patients of non-fundholding general practitioners, as well as those services outside the fundholding scheme for the patients of fundholders. Because of this, the equivalent information is not available for non-fundholders.

Fraud

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent of fraud in the national health service each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: We do not collect comprehensive information on the level of fraud against the National Health Service. However, the recent Audit Commission publication, "Ensuring Probity in the NHS", copies of which are available in the Library, reported that proven fraud was small.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific actions she has taken against fraud in the national health service since 1989.

Mr. Sackville: The prime responsibility for preventing and detecting fraud lies with the boards and managers of national health service bodies. We have, however, taken a number of national measures including the strengthening of external and internal audit, the creation of audit committees in all NHS bodies, and the issue of guidance on improving internal control in the NHS.

Cancer Care

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements cover the provision of palliative care to terminal cancer patients who are discharged to a nursing home.

Mr. Sackville: Where a patient with terminal cancer is discharged into a nursing home and is assessed as requiring specialist palliative care, it is the responsibility of the health authority to provide any such care over and above general nursing care. Specific arrangements should be agreed locally between health and local authorities.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements govern the employment by general practitioner fundholders of Macmillan nurses to care for their patients.

Mr. Malone: Palliative care services such as those provided by Macmillan nurses are not included within the scope of the current general practitioner fundholding scheme. There are currently four total purchasing pilots—a further 30 are being established—where fundholders can purchase all hospital and community care including palliative care. These pilots will be evaluated as part of the national programme.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many specialist breast cancer care units there are in the NHS.

Mr. Malone: The number of consultants who specialise only in the treatment of breast cancer is not known.

Cold Weather Deaths

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the excess winter death rate in England in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

The figures in the table give the percentage difference in the number of deaths recorded in the period December–March, compared to the average for the preceding August to November and the following April to July.

England

Year	*Percentage difference*
1988–89	+7.7
1989–90	+16.2
1990–91	+13.4
1991–92	+12.6
1992–93	+8.1

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died of hypothermia in each of the last five years, by region.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table:

Deaths in each regional health authority and Wales from 1988–92 where hypothermia (ICD [1]991.6) was the underlying cause

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Northern RHA	10	6	7	10	7
Yorkshire RHA	16	9	11	11	8
Trent RHA	14	17	10	18	10
East Anglian RHA	5	5	6	14	7
North West Thames RHA	8	14	12	24	10
North East Thames RHA	25	20	19	14	17
South East Thames RHA	19	16	13	27	10
South West Thames RHA	12	11	9	14	10
Wessex RHA	9	8	9	13	9
Oxford RHA	8	10	4	13	6
South Western RHA	16	11	11	18	9
West Midlands RHA	15	12	17	38	20
Mersey RHA	7	5	5	6	6
North Western RHA	17	12	10	16	13
Wales	12	10	8	13	7

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence her Department has of trusts collaborating with each other in the provision of services;

(2) what rules regulate collaboration between trusts in adjoining areas and in disparate areas.

Mr. Malone: None. The organisation of services should, in all cases, reflect the best interests of the public as both patients and taxpayers. Health authorities have the duty to ensure the services meet the needs of their local population. On 12 December 1994, the national health service executive published HSG(94)55 entitled, "The Operation of the Internal Market: Local Freedoms, National Responsibilities".

This guide sets out the criteria by which arrangements between trusts may be assessed in order to ensure they serve the interests of the public. It states the circumstances in which the NHS executive will intervene to protect the wider public interest, balancing this against the need for local freedom to shape services to best meet the needs of the local population.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what time commitment is expected of *(a)* NHS trust chairmen and *(b)* NHS trust non-executive directors.

Mr. Malone: National health service trust chairmen and non-executive directors normally devote around 16 to 24 hours per week and 16 to 24 hours per month respectively.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts have confidentiality clauses in their contracts for employees.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts have merged since April 1991.

Mr. Sackville: Since April 1991, three mergers between trusts have taken place and 16 mergers between trusts and directly managed units.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts have contracts with district health authorities and regional health authorities that are (i) outside the district health authority area and (ii) outside the regional health authority area in which they are situated.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount of accumulated assets of trust hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: The total value of net assets employed by trust hospitals at 31 March 1994 was £12,464,800,000.[1]

[1]Source: Trust summarised accounts for 1993–94. This figure is provisional being subject to audit by the National Audit Office.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surplus or loss has been accumulated by each trust hospital.

Mr. Sackville: The information will be placed in the Library.

Malnutrition

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information has been collected nationally regarding malnutrition and the incidence of rickets.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health does not collect information specifically about the incidence of rickets. Malnutrition is a term which covers a wide variety of single or combined deficiencies of nutrients and/or energy. A report of the national diet and nutrition survey of children aged one and a half to four and a half, due to be published in the spring, will provide information on the food and nutrient intakes of this group of the population and their vitamin D status.

Non-NHS Health Care

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total value of all health care in England provided outside the NHS in 1994 and 1979.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected by the Department.

Contracts

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has of any non-NHS providers failing to meet their contracts with NHS bodies.

Mr. Sackville: The Department of Health has no evidence of any non-NHS providers failing to meet their contracts with NHS bodies.

Private Insurance

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's estimate of the number of people with the cover of private dental insurance, and of private medical insurance.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of people with private dental insurance is not collected by the Department.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has of a correlation between the change of numbers of people waiting for hospital in-patient treatment and the health of the nation.

Mr. Malone: There is no proven correlation between any change in the numbers of people waiting for hospital in-patient treatment and the health of the nation.

Life Expectancy

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has that life expectancy has decreased for any group of people during the last 15 years.

Mr. Sackville: The available data for England do not identify any sub-groups whose life expectancy has decreased overall in the last 15 years. Life expectancy for males and females for every age group has increased since 1980. Over the period there are a few age groups for which life expectancy shows year on year fluctuations, but the overall trend for every age group is upward.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what increase in life expectancy has been experienced in *(a)* England, *(b)* the United Kingdom, *(c)* each EC country and *(d)* each OCED country.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for life expectancy at birth in England, United Kingdom, each European Community country and each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country for males and females for the years 1980 to 1992 will be placed in the Library.

Pregnancy Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of women aged under 20 years become pregnant in each district health authority area, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The number of conceptions and the rate per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 in each district health authority area in 1991, the latest year for which figures are available, were published in Office of Population Censuses and Surveys monitor FM1 94/1, "Conceptions in England and Wales, 1991: residents of regional and district health authority areas." Copies of this monitor are in the Library.

Private Patients

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the income from private patients for each trust hospital and special health authority hospital in 1993–94.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 13 January, columns *267-68.*

Disease Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people contracted *(a)* dysentery, *(b)* tuberculosis and *(c)* influenza in each regional health authority area and in total in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information will be placed in the Library. The data relating to influenza are cases of newly diagnosed episodes of influenza-like illnesses and are for the whole of England and Wales. A regional breakdown of these figures is not available centrally.

Staff Safety

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what compensation is offered to staff, including community care nurses, who are injured by patients, including challenging clients.

Mr. Malone: All staff are covered by the national health service injury benefits scheme. This is a statutory scheme providing benefits where an injury or disease, which is attributable to NHS employment, results in either a temporary loss of earnings or permanent reduction in earning ability.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many violent incidents were initiated by patients towards nurses and doctors, by region, in the last three years.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on 27 January 1994, column *375.*

Mental Illness

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the figures contained in her Department's recent survey of provider units of the numbers of mentally ill people placed on supervision registers for each unit in London.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not yet available centrally.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were conveyed by the police to a place of safety under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in each year since 1990.

Mr. Bowis: We will shortly be publishing a bulletin on "Legal Status Statistics 1987–88 to 1992–93" which will include figures for section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. Copies of the bulletin will be placed in the Library.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been subject to section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 during each year since 1991.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *535*, how many acute psychiatric beds are needed in London for average bed occupancy to be 85 per cent.

Mr. Bowis: It is for individual health authorities to assess the need for acute psychiatric beds and to contract with providers of mental health services to ensure that sufficient beds are available to meet the needs of their resident population. Average bed occupancy rates can be agreed as part of the contracting process and will relate to local circumstances. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 28 November 1994, column *535* for specific action being taken in inner London.

GP Fundholders

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholding practices there were in each family health service authorities and regional health authority in each of the last four years.

Mr. Malone: The available information will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were de-registered from general practitioners lists in total and at the request of the general practitioner broken down by family health service authority, by regional health authority and separating fundholding from non-fundholding general practitioners in each of the last four years.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Jones) on 19 July 1994, columns *367-68*, and the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 24 October 1994, column *449* and on 9 December 1994, column *400*.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence her Department has, and what representations it has received, on a link between the amount of general practitioner fundholding and the level of patient de-registration.

Mr. Malone: None.

Neurosurgery

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current policy of the Maudsley hospital in respect of the admission of emergency cases for neurosurgery; and what proposals there are to change this policy.

Mr. Malone: This is a matter for the Bethlem and Maudsley national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Bernard Williams, the chairman of the trust, for details.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will delay the closure of the accident and emergency unit at St. Bartholomew's hospital until 1 August 1995, pending a further review following the letter dated 13 January from the City and Hackney community health council.

Mr. Malone: No.

Patient Complaints

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what access her Department has to records of complaints from *(a)* patients and *(b)* members of surgical professions relating to surgical treatment; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The Department collects statistics on written complaints made by, or on behalf of, patients in England. The data give numbers of complaints which were wholly or partly about clinical issues but it is not possible to identify the numbers relating specifically to surgical treatment.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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